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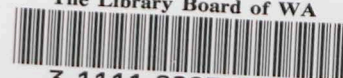
DEPARTMENT OF PREMIER AND CABINET
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
THE INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AUSTRALIA
(WA BRANCH)

Transcript of an interview with
DESMOND ROY KELLY
b.1934

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Interviewer Juliette Ludbrook
Duration 6 x 60 minute cassette tapes
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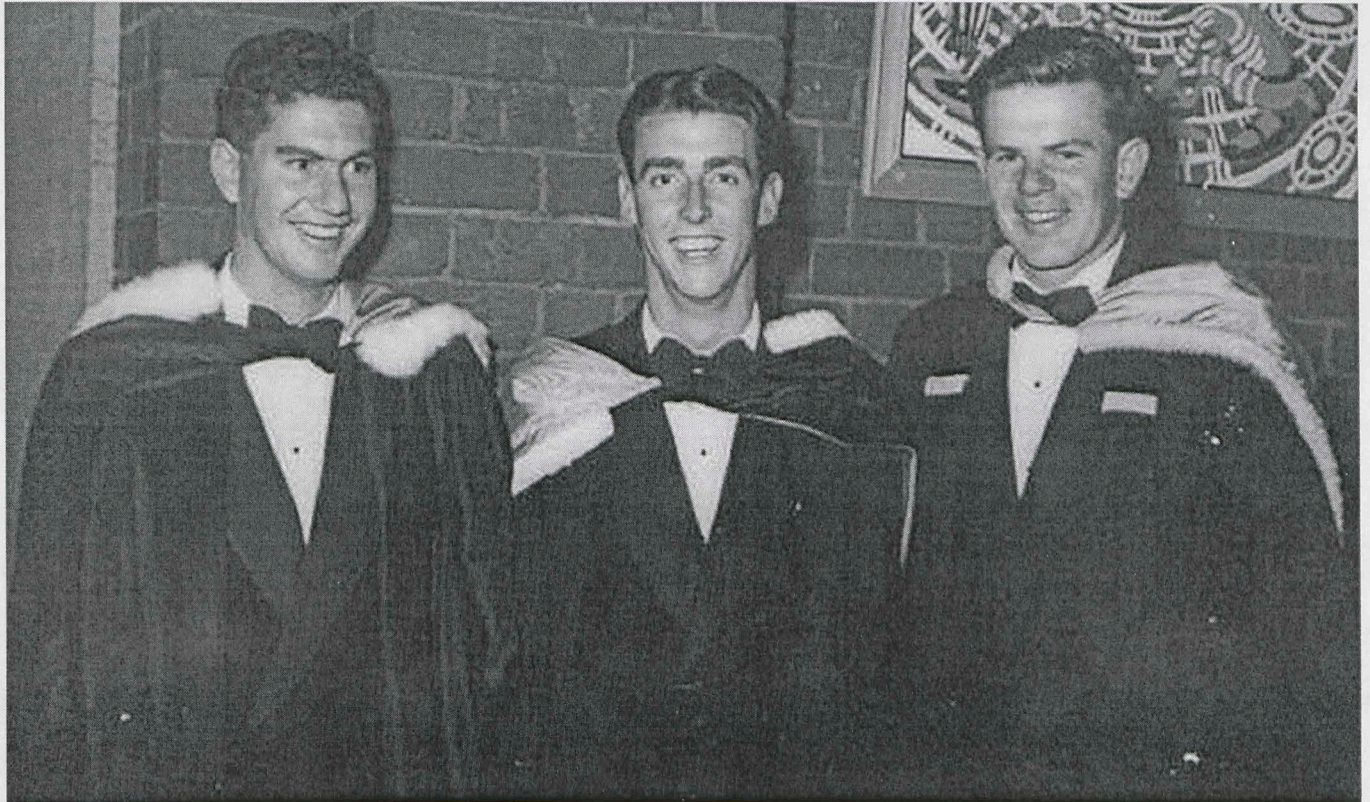


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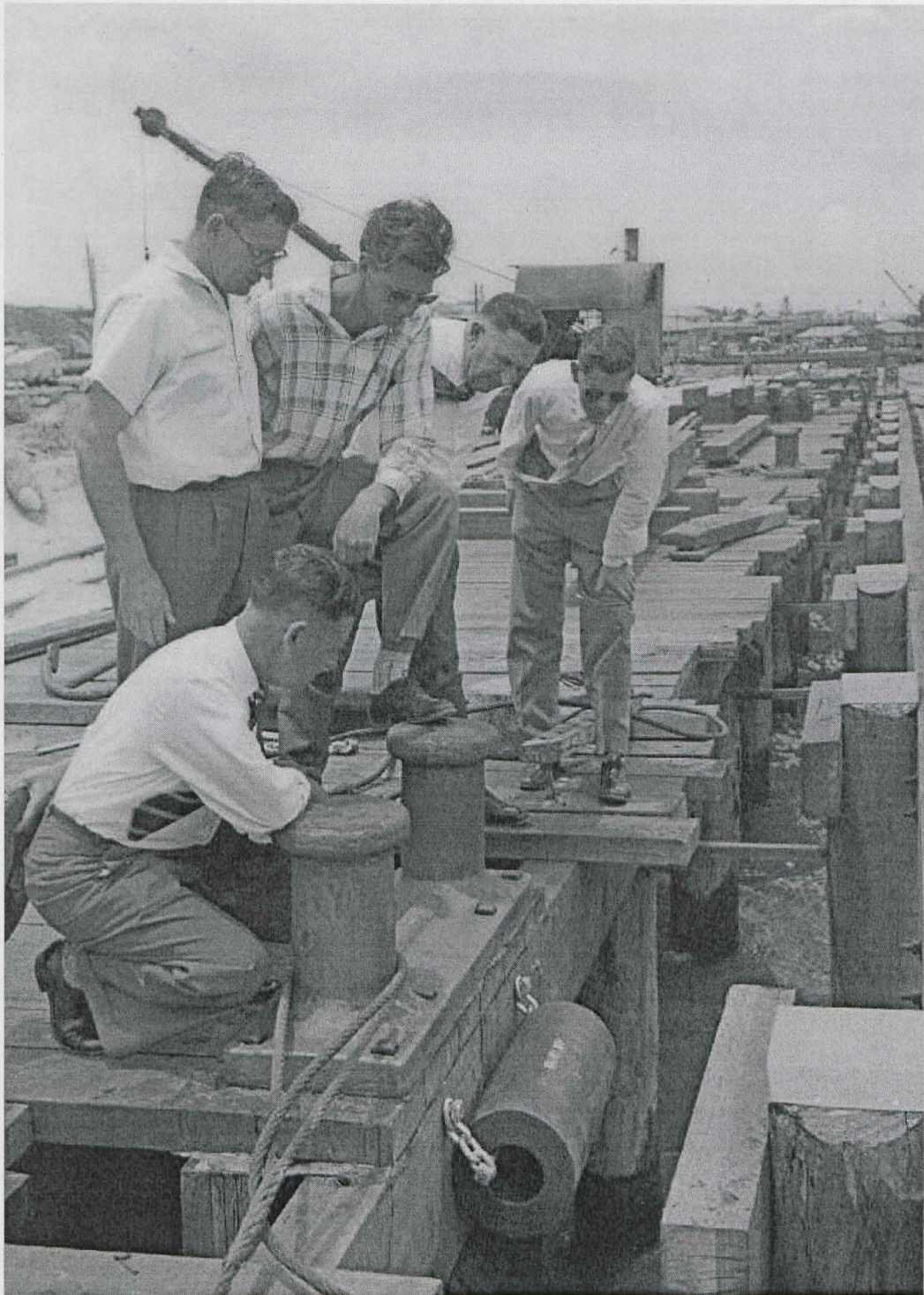
Introduction

The Department of the Premier and Cabinet in partnership with the Institute of Public Administration Australia (WA Branch) undertook a project to collect oral histories from long-serving public servants about the changes they observed and experienced over the term of their employment in the Western Australia Public Sector.

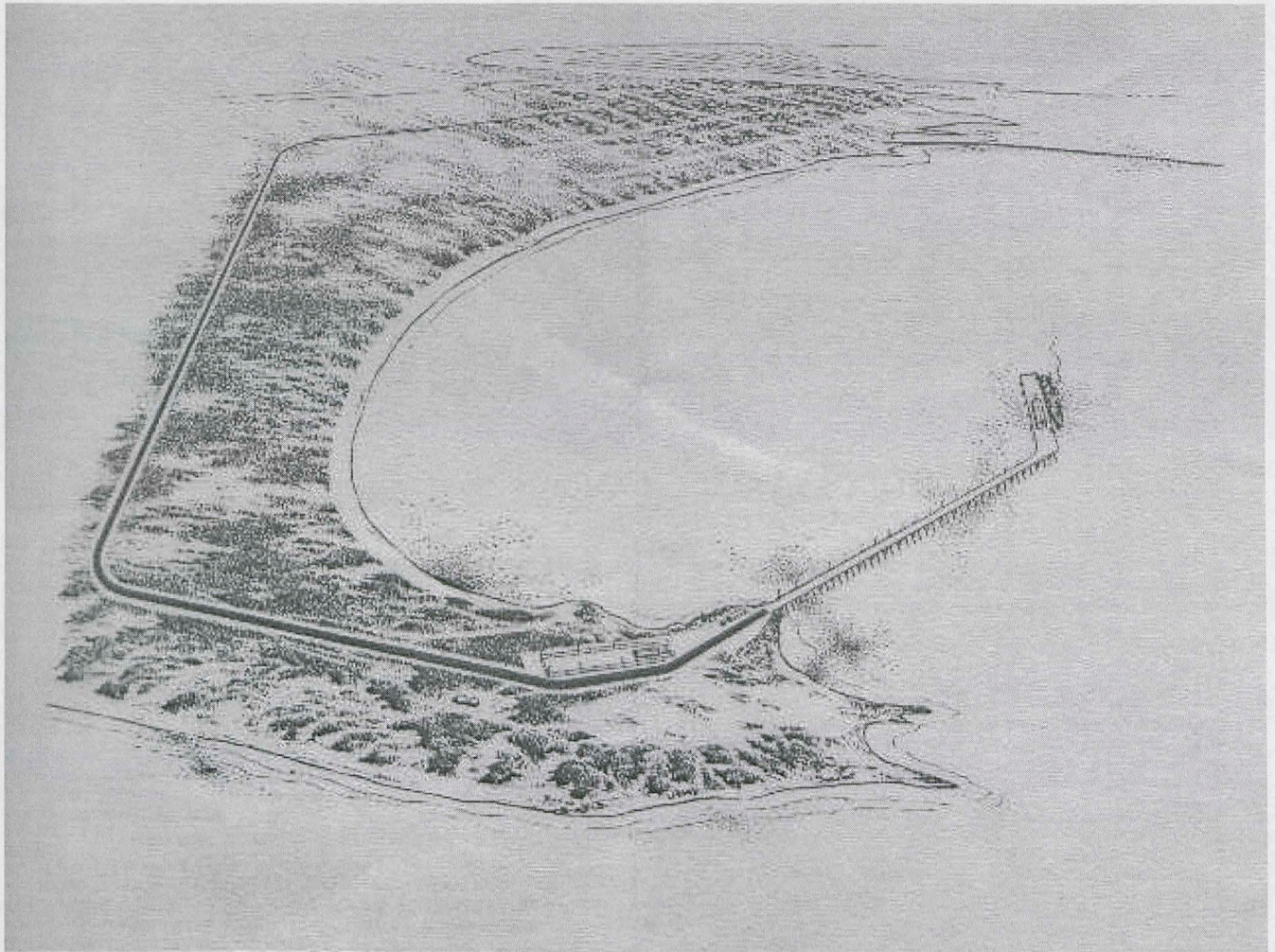
The following interview provides an insight into changes as they occurred in the public sector including, gender related issues in the workplace; changing attitudes to Indigenous Australians and people from other cultures; and the influence of technology on staff.



Graduation Ceremony University of Western Australia
left to right: Ernie Shelton, Des Kelly and Don Buchanan
April 1956



Inspecting a new fendering system at Fremantle Harbour Works.
Des Kelly centre in check shirt.
Late 1950's



BROOME DEEP WATER JETTY

TYPE	Steel and Concrete	APPROACH NECK	
BERTHING HEAD		Width	27 feet.
Width	85 feet.	Length	2,296 feet.
Length	600 feet.	MINIMUM DEPTH AT LOW TIDE	Outer 32 feet; Inner 28 feet.
Height of Deck above Low Water Level	41 feet.	FENDER SYSTEM	Steel Pile with Rubber Buffers.

DESIGNED AND CONSTRUCTED BY PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Under Secretary:
J. McCONNELL, J.P., A.A.S.A.

Director of Engineering:
J. E. PARKER, B.C.E., M.I.E., A.M.E.

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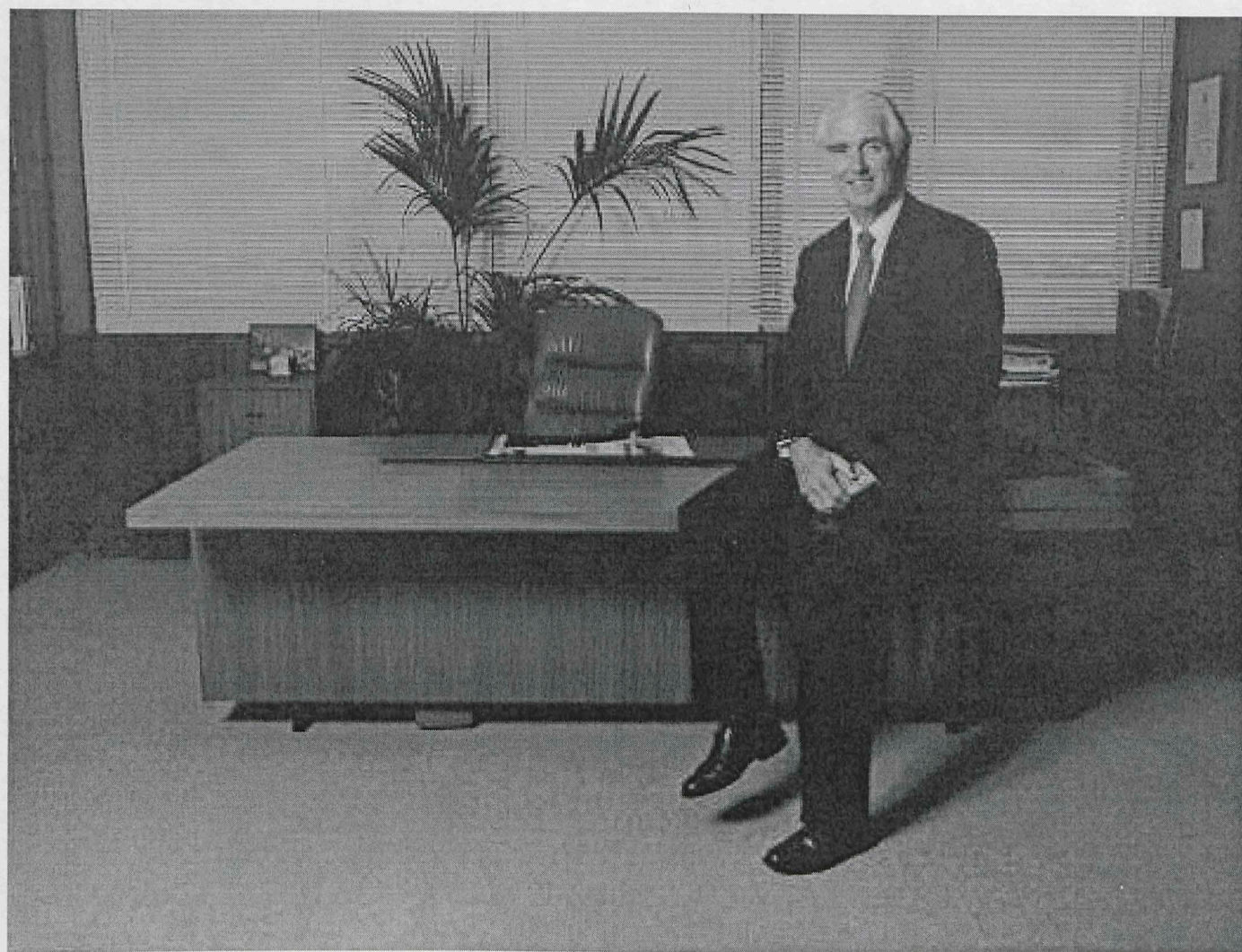
Broome Deep water Jetty program
1966



Kelly family at official opening of the Broome Deep Water Jetty
Des, Pam and son Brian



Des Kelly inspecting iron ore project in Pilbara
Late 1960s



Des Kelly, Director General Dept. of Mines
1992

Mines chief faces a big challenge

MINING administrator Des Kelly will not be satisfied until fatal accidents have been eliminated in the industry in WA.

And for Dr Kelly, who has been named a Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia (AM), that remains a great challenge in his position as Director-General of the WA Department of Mines.

Although he has overseen 12 years of tremendous growth in the state's mining industry, it is difficult for him to forget a 12-month period in the late 1980s when 21 people died in mining accidents.

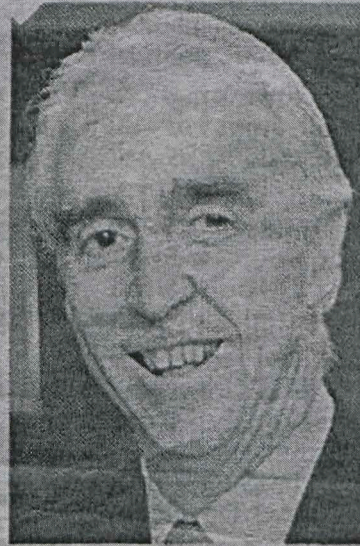
"We now recognise very clearly that the issue of safety in mines involves employers, the workforce and the department, and we have to have everybody working together," Dr Kelly said.

"You have to increase awareness — that is the key".

As a result of increased awareness together with tighter safety measures, the number of deaths fell to 10 in the last financial year and five so far this year.

Dr Kelly, 58, was awarded his AM for service to the mining industry.

He has presided over a period of rapid growth and change in which goldmining has had a resurgence, the diamond industry has come from nothing to a situation where Argyle Diamonds is the biggest producer by volume in



Dr Kelly

the world, nickel mining has boomed and WA is poised to take over as Australia's biggest petroleum producer.

"One of the great changes has been in the consideration of the environment and the rehabilitation of mined-out areas," Dr Kelly said. "Certainly, WA leads Australia and perhaps leads the world in this area."

The former engineer believes he's simply lucky to have had the opportunity to contribute to an industry which now supports almost 37,000 employees and which accounts for 72 per cent of the state's exports.

"It's been a very interesting, alive time and I've just been lucky to be part of it," he said.

Order of Australia appointment, General
Division for Services to the mining industry.
c. June 1992.

Senior manage



The Department of Resources Development Corporate Executive.
From left, standing: Dr Peter Murphy, Dr Jim Limerick, Mr Geoff Suttie.
Seated: Mr Lew Fritchard, Dr Des Kelly, Mr Noel Ashcroft.

Des Kelly (63)
AM, FTSE, FIE (Aust)
Chief Executive Officer
BE (Hons), PhD (Structural Engineering, University of London)

Rejoined DRD in 1993.

Was initially involved with the Public Works Department in marine construction and providing infrastructure for the iron ore industry. For 10 years from the late 1960s worked with what was the equivalent of DRD coordinating development of major resource projects. Headed up the WA Mines Department from 1980 to 1993 until appointed CEO of DRD.

Is ultimately responsible for the management of DRD to the Minister for Resources Development.

Jim Limerick (46)
Executive Director
BSc (Hons), PhD (Metallurgy, University of NSW), Grad Dip Bus

Joined DRD in 1986.

Prior to joining DRD, had 10 years experience in the Western Australian minerals industry, with technical and production management responsibilities in nickel smelting and refining operations.

Is responsible for the effective delivery of DRD's programs and services to its clients from a "whole of Department" perspective.

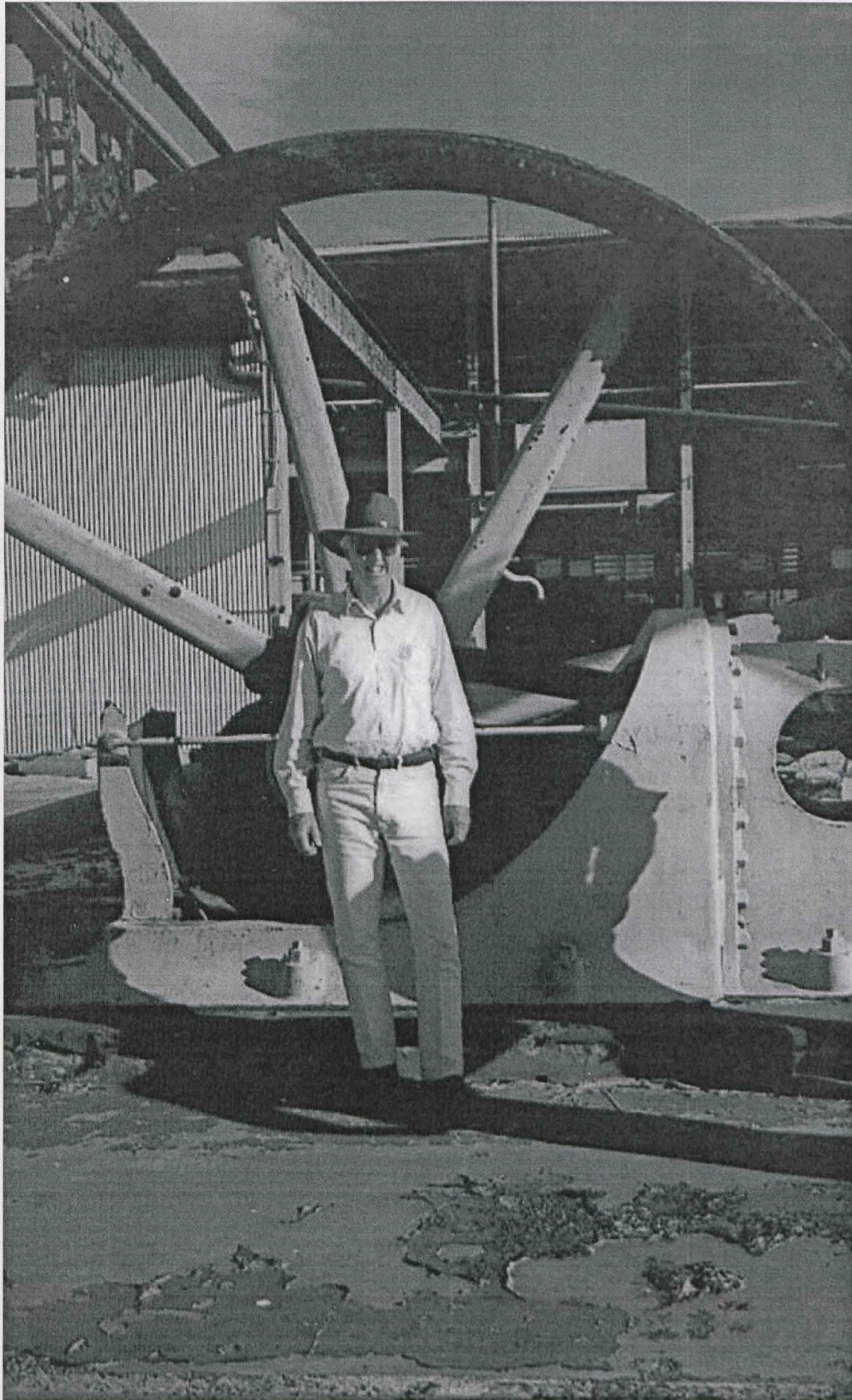
Photograph from the Annual Report of the
Department of Resources Development
Corporate Executive.
1997



Goldfields Gas Pipeline completion celebrations 1996
Colin Barnett and Des Kelly



Tokyo Gas Co. Premier Party 9th July 1995
Richard Court meets with Mr Hiroshi Watanabi (Chair) and Mr Anyai (President)
From r: Jack Gilleece, Jane Langton, Michael Walker, John Langenlaut,
Des Kelly and the Premier.



Return visit to Wyndham September 1998.
Old Meat Works (Grandfather had been involved with its construction)

This series of interviews was recorded for the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Institute of Public Affairs Australia, WA Division. This is the first tape conducted on 25 March 2004. There are six tapes in all. The tapes are recorded with Dr Des Kelly at his home at 21 Pandora Drive, City Beach. The interviewer is Juliet Ludbrook.

JL Des, could you just start the tape to identify it. Provide your name and your date of birth, place of birth and your father's and mother's name?

KELLY My name is Desmond Roy Kelly and I was born on 4 February 1934 in my grandmother's house in 34 Anzac Terrace, Bassendean. My mother and father had married in 1932 and they'd built their house at 24 Anzac Terrace, Bassendean. I lived there all my life until the time I left home to go elsewhere.

JL Which would have been what year?

KELLY That was in 1958.

JL Fifty-eight. So you lived how long in Bassendean?

KELLY Well I lived from 1934 till 1958 which is 24 years.

JL And your father's full name was?

KELLY My father's full name was Roy Kelly¹ He was one of 10 children, he was the second youngest of the family of 10. The family had come across from the Eastern States at about the turn of the century and had gone up to Muchea. My father was born in Muchea. They moved to Bassendean in 1919 and went to a house at 101 North Road, Bassendean, which is right down the end of North Road and on the river. Several times the house was inundated by floods. The Swan River seemed to flood in those days and that happened, I know, in 1926 and 1945², so it was a very interesting place in which to live. My mother, she came out from England in 1912 with her parents, and they settled at 34 Anzac Terrace, Bassendean in 1916. So she lived all her life there from that time onwards. She went to the Midland Junction High School and the West Road Primary School in Bassendean.

JL What was her name?

KELLY Her name was Muriel Marguerite Evans becoming Muriel Marguerite Kelly.

JL What brought your father to Bassendean?

¹ Born 1907 DK

² and 1946 DK

KELLY Well the family had gone to Muchea farming and I don't think that had been too successful and then they moved down to Bassendean so that my grandfather could get work. He died quite early on so I never actually knew him but my grandmother I did. She lived to a ripe old age of 83 and so I knew her quite well.

JL And your father's occupation?

KELLY My father, he worked at Cuming Smith & Mount Lyell in Bassendean – the superphosphate works. He worked there for about 30 years. That of course was the main industry in Bassendean or a main industry that had been there for quite a long time. He was the Work's Clerk there, and in fact he died at age 57 before retiring from Cuming Smith & Mount Lyell. So both my mother and my father were very much residents of Bassendean and I grew up there. I went to the Bassendean West Road Primary School where by coincidence my wife's grandfather's brother was the first headmaster at West Road Primary School so we had a bit of a link there. I went on from there to the Midland Junction High School. So I was at Bassendean Primary School from 1940 to 1946 and then went to the Midland Junction High School from '46, '47, '48, and then on to Modern School for 1949 and 1950.

JL And did you have any siblings?

KELLY Yes I have a brother, a younger brother, he was five years behind me. He also went to Bassendean Primary School, Midland Junction High School – which had become Governor Stirling High School by that time. He went on to become a pharmacist but he's lived in England since 1972 so we only see him on visits to the UK.

JL And his name is?

KELLY Geoffrey, Geoffrey Ross Kelly.

JL You mentioned before we started recording that living in Bassendean meant that the river was your life.

KELLY Yes.

JL Could you expand on that?

KELLY Well where we lived was fairly close to the river and to Guildford and it had been really the first part of West Guildford which became Bassendean. It was the first part that had been developed and so it had some historic buildings that went back for quite some time. There was just in fact diagonally³ across the road from where we lived was something which was

³ Actually the Lockridge Hotel was directly across the corner from 24 Anzac Terrace. Diagonally across the corner was an open space featuring two magnificent river gum trees

called the Lockridge Hotel which had been built before the turn of the century. It had been quite important I think as a weekend retreat for people who could come up [from Perth and Fremantle] and there was a special railway station almost where Success Hill Railway Station is at the moment, for people using the hotel. It subsequently became a girls' school and my memory of it is as a Salvation Army Home for old men. It's had a variety of uses over the years and I think it's still a hostel of some sort at the present moment. So that was directly across the road. Just down the road and on the river was the old Santa Rosa which was a large brick towered building which was originally a brewery, and a winery, and that was there for all the time I was growing up. Adjacent to it were the three bridges over the river. The [still existing road and rail bridges] and also something which we called 'the old convict bridge' which had been the first bridge across the river from Bassendean (West Guildford), to Guildford itself. That was still in, informal use (put it that way). People still used to use it when we were growing up. So they were sort of features in the river which attracted us as we went swimming and canoeing and playing Tarzan on the trees that overhung the river, and going to the nearby Success Hill Reserve which was a great swimming spot. So the river really was, you might say, the centre of growing up in Bassendean. So I remember that very well.⁴

JL And your family were there aspects of their lives that you held in some esteem or did it help you in later life what they'd...?

KELLY Well I think when you look back they were very conventional and stable, and I guess you might sort of say even ordinary [a family of the times] but they were a good spring board for, you know, life generally. My parents had both been, you might say scarred by the Depression so that their outlook on life was very much based upon that experience. My father had been working at Cuming Smith & Mount Lyell⁵ during the Depression and he was on £4.10.0 a week. Then he came home one day and said [he had been told], "We've got a Depression, your wages are now £2.10.0 a week." And that lasted for a year or two before they restored the wages. My mother had worked up until she was married. She'd worked in the motor industry. She'd been a secretary in the motor industry but having got married she didn't work again. She had a full time job if you like as a mother.

JL That was because she'd got married she was no longer...

KELLY Yes, well that was the convention at that time and so we were very conventional in that respect. The prime aim of their life was to get a house

which my father cared for on a voluntary basis for many years. This area has been named "Kelly Park" by the Town of Bassendean. DK

⁴ Incidentally, during the 1939-45 War, my father was the officer in charge of the local VDC (Volunteer Defence Corp) and for a period they were called up to guard these bridges. He and his colleagues spent some uncomfortable nights in a guardhouse which had been built on the western bank of the river, near the Santa Rosa, overlooking 'the old convict bridge' and the rail bridge. DK

⁵ super-phosphate works DK

and have it paid off and they actually built the house at 24 Anzac Terrace, Bassendean for the princely sum of, I think £650, and lived in it all of their lives. And I lived in it until I left home. So it was a, you might say a stable home with [where financial security was an important issue] and I was certainly influenced by those attitudes which my parents had picked up from the Depression. And the number one was that you should get a good job. That was the sort of basis of life.⁶

JL Bassendean is renowned for another famous person, Rolf Harris. Do you have any connection at all with him by any chance?

KELLY Lots of people knew Rolf Harris and lots of people claim him as a friend. He was one of those sort of people that had a million acquaintances. I knew him through the Bassendean Amateur Swimming Club which started in about 1946. My father was the Inaugural President of the Bassendean Amateur Swimming Club, and strong members in it were Rolf Harris and his parents. We used to go down to the Harris house which was on the river in Bassendean and old Mrs Harris used to be our swimming coach. We'd swim up and down, and across the river, with Rolf under her guidance so that they were very important to me for a couple of years I suppose⁷. Another person who was part of that group and joined us in it was a fellow called Eric McCrum who lived up the road from me. He started school at the Bassendean Primary School on the same day and we were in the same class. Of course we occasionally hear from Eric on the radio these days as the "bird man", who tells us all about the birds in Western Australia in the metropolitan area. That's been his speciality in life. And there's other people that I remember from those days of the Bassendean Amateur Swimming Club – again in the river.

JL In the river.

KELLY Mmm.

JL And at school were there any particular subjects that you really enjoyed or were really good at?

KELLY Yes. I think, and I noticed this in my own kids as well, that if you've got an inclination towards maths and physics and chemistry that that sort of leads you towards engineering and those sort of activities. I did have an attraction to those things. It really came out when I went to Modern School for

⁶ Flowing from this was a very strong influence from both parents that my brother and I should do well at school and should go on at school as far as possible. Both my father and mother had left school at age 14 to enter the workforce to supplement the family income as most people did at that time. DK

⁷ Rolf Harris was a good swimmer, a talented artist and above all, an entertainer, even as a 16 year old. As an artist he had a talent which amazed us as teenagers. Even more amazing was the Harris household which was totally given over to art – paintings and drawings all over the house, on the walls and doors – anywhere and everywhere. And Rolf was always playing his piano and piano accordion and trying out new tunes and ideas. The wobble board and 'Seven beers with the wrong woman' had their first rehearsals with we swimmers after training at the Harris' household on the river at Bassendean. DK

those two years, 1949 and 1950, where there was every opportunity to really get into maths and physics and chemistry and applied maths. Those tended to be the subjects I was good at. I was all right in English but no good at French.

JL Were there any teachers that particularly influenced you?

KELLY Well Modern School was full of good teachers and one of them that I do remember kindly was a fellow called, Wally Neil, who taught us chemistry. He ended up being Director General of Education in later years and another one was a teacher called Bob Kagi whose son [subsequently taught at] Curtin University. But Bob Kagi as a physics teacher also left an impression on me. And at Midland Junction High School there was a man and wife combination there, the Halls. Noel and Una Hall who were again in physics and chemistry and I was very much encouraged by them in the years that I was there.

JL Before - well after school were there any other studies that you undertook before joining the public service?

KELLY Well, having matriculated from Modern School it was then, what did one do? I've got to say that from my situation the only really tertiary qualification that one saw as an opportunity was industrial chemistry. That seemed to be the thing those days if anybody had a bent on physics or chemistry when you went to a tertiary level you did science and you did industrial chemistry. I actually enrolled in this at the University of Western Australia and I went along to pick up a university handbook at the time of enrolling and in flicking through it I saw this engineering course which was a five year course. Saw all the subjects and that really sounded like me so I went back and actually changed my enrolment from science to engineering before we started. That really was the way that I got into engineering. That was a five year course at the University at that time. Three years full time and then two years in which you were sort of part time where you spent some time [one term] in the field on practical experience. So I was there from 1951 to 1955 at UWA. Ended up with a degree in engineering with first class honours in Civil Engineering. During the course I had been able to obtain what was called the ISAS Scholarship, the Industrial Sales and Services Scholarship, which enabled me to stay at university over one of the long vacations [1954/55] and do research work. And that led on, as I say, to the successful completion of the degree with honours. That was 1955.

JL Have you ever wondered what would have happened if you'd taken the other road, gone along with science, the original...?

KELLY Yes. Yes, well yes I thought about that and particularly when I went back to the Mines Department where one of my responsibilities were the Government Chemical Laboratories which had about 100 chemists working there. And I guess I saw that it was a career that I'm glad I hadn't followed because it was constrained if you like, in that it was very much a metropolitan

existence, metropolitan area existence, and it was very much an office activity if you like without field work. Without too much field work.

JL So entering the public service would that have been the only road you could have taken with that degree?

KELLY No, one could have had jobs elsewhere although that wasn't quite as clear when one started out bearing in mind I was 17 when I started at the university.⁸ With my parents, you might say - - - the most important thing was to get a job. I applied for cadetships which were available. I applied to the Public Works Department, to the Railways and to the Department of Defence, [which all] had scholarships where they gave you vacation employment and then gave you a job at the end of the successful university career. I in fact was offered a scholarship with these three organisations and I ended up accepting the one in the Public Works Department. It started off [on the basis that] it didn't pay you anything during the study periods but it gave you paid employment in the vacations and it gave you a job at the end of it and that was the most important thing.

JL So would the other ones have also given you that job at the end of it or was it just the work that you thought you'd be doing involved with it made you choose the Public Works?

KELLY The other ones would have given a job at the end as well but I was most attracted, of the three, to the Public Works Department and their sort of work appealed to me. So that's the way I went.

JL Do you have any recall of how you felt about what your future was going to be at that time? Was there any long term vision or was it just great to have that secure job?

KELLY I don't think one knew enough about it to really know but I was certainly attracted by the thought that you'd get out there and build things. So I was attracted by that very much. It was during the five years of university and particularly during the vacations where you worked [in the field] with the Public Works Department that you very quickly got a better idea as to - - - the sort of work that you'd be doing, and the variety of the work. Bear in mind that the Public Works, I guess, was in its prime at this time. It had started off really with CY O'Connor at the turn of the century.⁹ It was the only organisation that built infrastructure so that in the beginning it built roads and it built railways and it did public buildings and all manner of public works because there was no private sector to build any of those things. The railways had hived off into a separate

⁸ I was the first one from either side of the family to have been to University with the purpose of entering a profession. So there was little advice around as to how to go about it. A new world was opening up. DK

⁹ Actually, the Public Works Department's beginnings coincided with settlement of the Colony in 1829, but in the 1950s the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme and the Fremantle Harbour of CY O'Connor still dominated the corporate memory. DK

railways organisation. The mains roads had become a separate Main Roads Department but there was still a great deal of work left behind for the Public Works to do. Particularly in the area that I went into which was Harbours and Rivers Branch of the Public Works Department. But in hindsight it was at its prime in those fifties. From then onwards it really declined until it went out of existence in the eighties as the private sector grew and started to do by contract so much more of this infrastructure. Also as other government departments weren't content to let all [of their] work be done by the Public Works Department they wanted to actually directly engage people, the private sector, to do some of these public works. So I was there at that time very much in its prime with a whole variety of work from Water Supply to Drainage to Harbours and Rivers, to the Department of the North West and so on. It was a very wide ambit of work.

JL Des in 1955 you graduated from UWA with?

KELLY Degree [of Bachelor of Engineering] with first class honours [in civil Engineering] and that then led into full time work with the Public Works Department. I was posted to the Fremantle Harbour Works which was an interesting place to go to because the site office there was in fact an old pilot's house that had been dragged from Rous Head around to a site in Fremantle, close to the wharf. It had been used as an office for the Fremantle Harbour Works for many years and when one went through the old drawers there were drawings of the Fremantle Harbour that actually had CY O'Connor's signature on the bottom of them authorised by him. So it had really been a construction job that had never ended. [The Fremantle Harbour Works] had started [before] the turn of the century and was still going quite strong when I got there in 1956 as the construction authority for the Fremantle [Harbour Trust] that actually ran the port, but we did all the maintenance and all the construction.

JL That sense of history which I get that you are very conscious of, has that sense of history been something that you have felt to in your work?

KELLY I've always been interested in linking what one's doing with what's happened in the past. And certainly one got a sense of some of the work that I was involved in was actually changing the direction that the State was going in. Later on when one got involved in the mining industry and one looked back at historically the impact of the mining industry on the development of the State and then how the State had actually plateaued and levelled off whilst the mining industry was quiescent. And later on I was involved in really the re-emergence of mining industry and therefore it followed that the State was going to grow and expand. So one felt sort of part of that resurgence. I was conscious of that. But just the Fremantle Harbour Works I guess, because it was an historic engineering development, couldn't help but awaken some thoughts as to wondering what it was like back when the place had been developed from a river that just [flowed] into the sea over a rock bar into what I found there in 1956, which is really not much different to what it is today.

JL That first year - well even before you started work being interviewed for the Public Works, how did that go?

KELLY Well I came to realise – well certainly at the time and later on one realised - that getting a cadetship with the public service was quite a thing. It was taken very seriously by the Public Works Department and the public service. The interview that I went to was conducted in the old Treasury Building. There was about three people present. I can't remember exactly who it was but I think it was the Public Service Commissioner himself at the time. I think there was a senior engineer from the Public Works Department as part of the interview panel which was quite an occasion for somebody who had just finished school to confront this board of three very senior people and to be questioned about why you wanted to be a cadet in the public service.

END OF TAPE ONE SIDE A

JL So Des you were just describing that interview when you got your cadetship and you mentioned who was there. What was the proceedings like?

KELLY Well it was a series of questions by these, as I say senior people, to you about why you wanted to be an engineer, and why you wanted to be an engineer in the public service and so on which of course were things I hadn't thought very much about. So the pressure was really on in this interview to, on the spot, come up with logical answers so it was quite a trial. And I was, I guess, pleased that it came out the way it did.

JL For an interview like that would you... did you get any help or people say they're going to ask these sorts of questions or...?

KELLY No I think that that's something that I think about with my parents because of their particular background and upbringing and the work they had done weren't actually in a position to advise me and prepare me to take this, you might say the next step. I was the first person on either side of the family going back as far as you like that had ever been to university. And so it was, you know, breaking new ground for the family, if you like, so you couldn't look to the family for anybody who's had that experience and who was able to guide you. It was something I was conscious of for quite some time. I guess my colleagues that I came to study with and work with, many of them came from families that could in fact help with advice a great deal which I couldn't get. So you were on your own to that extent.

JL So did many of the other people that you went through university, did many of those join the public service?

KELLY Yes, there was four public service cadets that started university with me. We were in a class of 70 people of which only 28 finished the five year course unscathed – in other words hadn't missed a year. So it was pretty competitive and pretty tough. But the four public service cadets were part of that 28 that did finish the course. I guess interestingly enough there was only two girls in a year of 70 people. And that was just what it was then, only men did engineering. It's changed over the years and there's a higher proportion now doing engineering but it's still pretty much a male dominated profession. I guess because the lifestyle of a lot of it where one goes to remote areas almost necessarily is something which still doesn't attract women to go into it.

JL Do you remember or do you know what happened to those two, the two women that went through?

KELLY My memory is they did finish the course, yes. But they tended to go into the branches of engineering like electronics and so on or the Telecom [telecommunications], those sort of activities where one could you might say be city based rather than actually have to have field jobs. And it's hard to think back now that there were those constraints on women at the time. As I've mentioned it was still very much the convention then that women gave up work when they were married, that women didn't go into professions other than nursing and teaching. And indeed, when I married Pam in 1958 she'd

previously worked for the Commercial Union Assurance Company as a secretary and when we were married she had to leave that company because that was company policy. So nothing had changed in that respect since my mother had actually had to leave work in 1932 when she was married. And so by 1958 there'd been no real change to that and so within the public service and generally across business, less so in private enterprise but certainly in government service, when you got married you left work and did something else¹⁰.

JL So that going back to those first days at work for you in 1956, would there have been any females in the office that you worked in?

KELLY Yes there was. At Fremantle Harbour Works there was one female she was the secretary/typist that did the typing but there was no-one in the actual manual workforce that was - We had 250 men involved in construction activities and as I say there was only one woman and she was in the office. There was no engineers that were females and that was the way it was. Very much a male oriented and dominated work place.

JL And in those first days is there any incident that you particularly remember or any projects you were working on that was particularly memorable?

KELLY Well I think it was in the first days that I was so glad that I had ended up in the Harbours and Rivers Branch of the Public Works because obviously you're going to be near the sea and if one's going to be working and living near the sea well it's got a chance of being a bit more attractive than doing the water supply in the back of beyond. So I certainly was very pleased with that. And the actual nature of the work was quite exciting. It was boats and tugs and barges and floating pile frames and all of those things with steam winches and diesel hammers. All of those things which were quite exciting to a young engineer, and so I guess I was attracted to it from day one. During those first four years I was really based in Fremantle but also did some work in Geraldton and in Bunbury. The activity in Fremantle was developing Cockburn Sound so there were channels which had been dredged down to Cockburn Sound. But they had to have all the navigation aids, [which] had to be made in Fremantle, put on barges, towed out into Cockburn Sound, placed on the bottom in good weather and then anchored there. This was quite exciting and I can still almost remember the sounds and the smells that came from having steam winches and diesel engines and all that sort of thing mixed up with the salt air, it was something that was very evocative and you don't forget.

JL Des were you still living at home during this period were you?

KELLY I was living at home for the first short while but then Pam and I married in 1958 and then we moved into a flat in Nedlands and so that was

¹⁰ In Pam's case, she went across to the other side of the terrace to become a legal secretary until we went overseas in 1960. In London she held secretarial jobs before we returned to Australia in 1963 DK

when I left home. We lived in the flat in Nedlands until we went overseas in September 1960. So I was working at Fremantle from those two places.

JL When you first began what were the working hours – do you remember? Were there things like overtime and how much you were paid?

KELLY Well as regard the actual workforce they of course worked under very much unionised rules and so that the overtime and that sort of thing certainly applied to them. But as a professional engineer you weren't expected to be paid overtime unless it was something particularly unusual. Like, for example, in later years when we went to Broome and the job worked six days a week for 10 hours, that's everybody worked for that time. Then one was paid overtime for the additional day, there was an allowance for that overtime. But the hours of work really weren't, one, weren't you know a subject of much interest. So hours of work really weren't a consideration. One worked about 40 hours, 40 or 45 hours a week depending on the requirements of the job. Which of course because the job was governed by the weather and the tides it tended to be a little bit erratic, starting early, finishing late, those sort of things. But hours of work weren't really an important issue. I can recall that whilst during my studies while at school I used to work at Cuming Smith & Mount Lyell in Bassendean in the bag room where they printed the 'super' bags. This was vacation employment. When I started doing that which must have been about 1946 it was a standard 44 hour week which in a year after, a year or two after that came down to a 40 hour week so that was the transition that took place there. That particular job in the bag room at Cuming Smith's was really a driving force for me to say to myself there was no way that I was going to spend my life doing that sort of work. And if getting on with the studies was going to get you something better than that well it was a pretty good idea. (laughs) The particular job that I had - and they put all the young boys on this - was behind a bag printing machine so that somebody put the bags into the front and it came through the rollers and your job was to receive the bags at the other end of the rollers and fold them in half and put them onto a barrow and then catch up with the bags that come through in the interim. And to do that I think there was 8,000 bags a day and so you did that all day. It was quite an amazing experience because when you started you found that the time dragged so slowly just on this repetitive work but after a while you developed a technique of letting your mind wander. And although you were physically doing the same thing your mind was running away doing all sorts of things, and the time just passed. It was quite an amazing experience I guess, a conditioning. So that really made quite an impact on my approach to study in life and work, nothing could be as bad as printing bags at Cuming Smith's & Mount Lyell.

JL You don't happen to remember how much you got for it?

KELLY Oh yes the first wage as a 14 year old was £1.17.6 a week. That must have been about '46 or '47, that was a 14 year old. The wages that the adult people got was something like £8.0.0 a week, yes something like that.

JL And that was a vacation job that you did over a number of years?

KELLY Oh over a number of years while I was at school before then taking on the cadetship. Thereafter I had vacation jobs with the Public Works Department.¹¹ But this was while I was still at school. And as I say printing bags is not a very exciting activity. (laughs)

JL Once you'd begun work with the Public Works Department did you do any other training courses at all? Did this become a part of...?

KELLY There were no training courses perhaps like they now have. It was more instruction on the job from more senior engineers so that you were immediately thrown into it and the guidance came from the more senior engineers. The first days at work do evoke memories of suddenly being told that, "Oh well look you'll take over this little job. This is what we're doing and here is the leading hand that's in charge of 10 men, and what we're doing it is by barge and you've got to do this, that and the other." And suddenly you were sort of in charge even though you were the most junior person on the job. You were in charge. I'd often thought a little bit like the old bit that used to be in the British Army where you could - came in as a Lieutenant without any experience at all and were stuck in charge of all these hard bitten soldiers. This was exactly the same experience. So you had to sort of develop a relationship between yourself and this perhaps 50 year old leading hand and a group of 10 or 12 men where you had to exert authority but by the power of your own personality. You had to be accepted as the person in charge and that was quite a challenge. And of course it never stops. That's what sort of the engineering career is that you progressively find yourself in charge of bigger jobs with more people, where if you're going to do it properly you've got to demonstrate and command the respect of the people that you're working for. And it just doesn't come through qualifications, it comes through experience, and I guess personal abilities to manage. But certainly the first days of actually being put in charge of something and these people was something you don't forget.

JL Did you ever find that they challenged you at all? Did you...?

KELLY No. No, it was... it all went well. Well most of [the time. On] the first day on the job a very senior engineer came to me and said, "Oh look you've got to get the respect of these guys, you've got to insist that they call

¹¹ During my cadetship years from 1951 to 1955 I received on-the-job training during University vacations at a number of worksites in the State. In 1951 I worked at Harvey on the irrigation scheme, mostly involved in the concrete lining of irrigation channels. In 1952, it was with the Goldfields and Country Water Supply Branch and included living for short periods at Kalgoorlie, Esperance, Southern Cross, collie and Bridgetown. Accommodation provided for cadets at Harvey and Collie was in a tent with an extended fly-sheet and a wooden floor, which I found to be reasonably comfortable even in mid winter. Bridgetown was a different matter. I went there in the middle of winter and was given a bed in the corner of the meter repair shed - an unlined corrugated iron building. At one end was a lined room occupied by the engineering surveyor who was a permanent employee on the job. I only lasted one night in the shed as the outside (and inside) temperature dropped to freezing point as it often does in Bridgetown at that time of the year. I moved across the road into the Bridgetown Hotel for the rest of the two weeks stay, which I had to pay for myself which took all my wages. Subsequently I was asked for a 'please explain' which I did unsuccessfully as it turned out because I didn't get any help with my hotel costs, but I was never asked to sleep in an unlined meter shed again. Really it was an example of some of the thinking of the senior people in the PWD at the time - 'what was good enough for us in the 30s is good enough now'. Times were changing even then and the PWD lost a number of cadets and engineers because at least some of the branches of the PWD were slow to change. I was lucky that I was posted to the Harbours & Rivers Branch which was ahead of the times with its approach to accommodation and the like. DK

you Mr Kelly." And I was sensitive enough to sort of think, well that might have been the ways in the thirties and before the war but I sense that things were changing so I never took that advice. I always just let them, all these guys [decide what they would call me]. I was on first name terms with them. It was interesting to note that after you'd actually exerted your influence on them that they automatically went to call you Mr Kelly without ever having said it. And it was sort of an interesting development that I sort of observed. And of course that was really the beginning of the change which you got in management and that sort of thing in organisations where first name terms was pretty usual.

JL And Des speaking about the men that you were working with, what were these guys? Were they all Australian, were they migrants, were they aborigines, were they...?

KELLY Yes in 1956 the workforce of Fremantle Harbour Works was very much a mixed lot. There were certainly quite a number of Australians that had been in Australia for quite some time. There were the immigrants that had come in post war and a number of them worked for them [Fremantle Harbour Works]. There was very few aborigines but there were a few that were in the workforce. One of the things that struck me was that so many of these guys had never reached their full potential. They had never had the opportunity for education to take them further and so you did have working as labourers and as leading hands very intelligent and capable people who at another time today would have gone on to much greater things but they never had that opportunity to do it. I also observed that quite a number of the workforce couldn't read or write and when it came time to sign anything a lot of them would make their 'mark' because they couldn't actually sign a signature. One particular incident that I remember well was going around with the pay clerk, who always had to be accompanied by an engineer, as you paid the men. You went around the job paying the men in the various locations and this pay clerk laid the pay book out and gave the people their money and they were expected to sign or make their mark on this book. And this particular day there's the queue of men coming up and getting their pay and the next person was somebody – was an Aboriginal – and the pay clerk said, "Okay here's your money, you might like to make your mark." And this guy looked him in the eye, picked up the pen and went, 'William J Robinson', with a flourish like that and stuck the pen down. I've always treasured that moment (laughing) where the bloke had been put down but he came back so well. Because Aborigines sort of in the workforce were still pretty unusual at that time. You know in growing up in Perth like we did in Bassendean there were a few Aborigines around but you didn't have any interaction with them at all. Success Hill which was a historic reserve behind where we lived had once been a major Aboriginal camp. But by the time I was growing up it had been moved further north and out of Bassendean. You did see some aborigines would call house to house selling clothes props but that was about the only contact that sort of one had. So my incident with William J Robinson was one that I treasure some what. In later years when I went to Wyndham and we were working on the jetty construction at Wyndham our pile driving crew up there consisted of a number of Aborigines from Forrest River Mission. They were a different type of Aborigine to ones I had seen elsewhere. These were very tall, lean, angular sort of men and I think it's probably due to

the fact that those northern coasts of Western Australia had been visited by others over the years. They came down and worked at Wyndham and they were fantastic athletes these guys. They played basket ball and, you know, were really athletes. I can still remember the way that they handled this 80 foot high pile driving frame which wasn't vertical, often it leaned over forwards and backwards and these guys had to work on a sloping platform. Their physical prowess was really superb. And I think that was probably their first contact with the white community when they came down to work at Wyndham in 1960. But I went to Wyndham at the end of my first period from 1956 to 1960. I went to Wyndham just before we went off to England in September 1960. The job at Wyndham was the first of the jetties which were built under a national development program which the Commonwealth Government was funding for roads and jetties in the north of Australia. And I was asked to go to Wyndham and so I left Pam behind in Perth for a three month period while I went to Wyndham. I arrived there on September 3¹², 1960 and came out at Easter time. And that was quite an experience. A fellow called Jim Butcher was the Resident Engineer and I went up to give him a hand. The climate was absolutely horrendous. Wyndham in the summer time with high humidities and high temperatures was really quite stressful. If you ever see a map of Australia which shows the climatic zones which is based on temperature and humidity at 3 o'clock in the afternoon you will find that it all zeroes in on Wyndham as being the worst place in Australia for a climate. And as I say I lived there in the middle of the wet season. It was building, re building the Wyndham jetty in a steel jetty out into Cambridge Gulf and it was quite a task.

END OF TAPE ONE SIDE B

¹² corrected to – January. DK

This interview is recorded for the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Institute of Public Affairs Australia WA Division on 25 March 2004 with Dr Des Kelly at his home at 21 Pandora Drive, City Beach. The interviewer is Juliet Ludbrook.

JL Des how long were you in Wyndham?

KELLY Well it was for about three months. When one went to live there we found that they had built three new houses at what's called The Three Mile. It's now quite a large suburb of Wyndham but at the time we were the first three houses at The Three Mile. There was the Wyndham township itself, there was the Three Mile, The Six Mile Hotel and The Twelve Mile, that's the way that Wyndham was set out. So these three houses built by the Public Works which had the Resident Engineer, Jim Butcher [and his wife Gloria in one of them], a couple of assistant engineers including myself [in the second house] and a foreman [Bob Dickson and his wife in the third]. We were the only people at Three Mile. We had our own little power plant out there which went off at 10 o'clock at night. So that that means that from 10.00 until 6.00 the ceiling fans didn't work so one had to try and sleep up there without fans in pretty high temperatures and humidities so it was quite difficult. The other thing was that the actual water supply which was supplied to us, the pipes were, I think, quite shallow in the ground so that by the time the water got to the house it was hot. You could never have a cold shower, the water out of the pipes was just always hot. So we took to actually filling up the bath and letting the water cool down at least to air temperature as a way of cooling down a little bit. And I think the greatest pleasure up there was when it rained usually at night time with a thunder storm of actually going out on to a little back path that went out to the clothes line and standing out there in the rain as it came down and cooled you off. It's probably a measure of how tough the climate was when you found that to be a pleasurable thing.

JL No air-conditioning?

KELLY No air-conditioning no, just ceiling fans but they went off at 10 o'clock at night. We had our meals at the old Wyndham Meat Works which interestingly enough my grandfather when he came out from England in 1911 had actually spent - - - [two dry seasons], up in Wyndham building the meat works. What they did in those times was to take the group of men from Perth to Wyndham in the dry season and to build the meat works and they did that over two dry seasons. So he actually lived in Wyndham for a couple of years before his family came out from England. The job that we were on, building the Wyndham Jetty, was the first time that a construction job had ever been continued through the wet season. Always up to that time you packed up what you were doing in November and early December and came back in April of the next year. Because everybody knew that, you know, white men couldn't work up there in the wet season. So ours was sort of ground breaking to that extent that we tried to put in accommodation for the men in the camp in Wyndham which had shutters and shades and things. And we actually did work through the wet season and successfully did it. That was repeated at the Derby Jetty

and the Broome Jetty which I worked on after in '65, '66, [1963 – 66] that sort of period.

JL So you were there for...

KELLY Three months.

JL Three months.

KELLY Yes.

JL And then what happened?

KELLY Well, I should just mention that while I was there that the whole town as it were became isolated due to the wet season. Yes you had the State Ships that called in probably every 10 days or two weeks. You could communicate with telegraph or telegram but there was no phones to the south. The plane came in twice a week provided it could land because the air strip would often go out with the rain. So we practically had a period of two weeks where the plane couldn't land. So Wyndham was essentially isolated for that period of time. You couldn't get out of town very far because the roads closed over. And so I mean for recreation all you could do was drive about 30 miles out along the road, turn around and come back. It was quite spectacular in the wet season but you couldn't go very far. It was on one of those particular visits on a Sunday that we came across this group of Aborigines that were out there. They'd actually also come out from Wyndham on the same day, you know, a truck had taken them out - they had this old truck. They'd gone hunting and they'd caught this great big - we used to call them bungarras, lizards about five or six feet long - which they'd caught and killed. There was this tiny little fire with the bungarra sitting on the top of it. You might say heating up and cooking about 10 percent of the length of the bungarra which when it was, I think, hardly had been warmed from one end to the other was taken off and consumed with great delight. They offered us some of it but we didn't accept (laughing) but looked on in wonder at this picnic that was going on. But that was all part of the sort of living in Wyndham at the time. When I came out at Easter in 1960 the jetty was about one third complete I suppose and it was finished in the next year or so after I'd moved on to other things.

JL So why did you leave Wyndham?

KELLY Well the arrangement was that a group of us would go up and there give Jim Butcher a hand three months at a time as an assistant engineer and help him. So quite a number of us cycled through that particular experience. I came back to Fremantle Harbour Works but had already applied for a Gledden Fellowship from the University of Western Australia to study at a London University. Pam and I had decided that it would be a good idea if we could see something else of the world and one way of doing it was to actually study overseas. So I was successful in getting the Gledden Fellowship which paid us I think it was £750 for two years. And so off we went in September

1960 on a big adventure which was to go to the UK and study for two or three years.

JL How did you find that being an Australian in London in 1960?

KELLY Oh it was a marvellous experience which I guess changes your outlook, attitude for the rest of your life.

JL In what way?

KELLY Well you suddenly look at Western Australia and Perth from outside. You put it in perspective in Australian and in international affairs. You see lots of other places. I think you get rid of that bit of self delusion which says that Perth is the only place on earth, it's the best place, it's the best of this and the best of that. Where in fact when you look around there are many beautiful countries and places and so on where one can live happily. I'm not saying that Perth is not a great place but it is. But there are other places on earth and it sort of puts that all in perspective.

I studied at Queen Mary College in the Mile End Road in London. We lived at a place called Leytonstone E11. Pam worked for those three years for Bryant and May the match makers in Bow in East London. We took full advantage of the holidays that we had, and before we came home, and travelled extensively in England and Ireland and on the continent in a car, a Morris Mini and a tent. So we saw a lot of the countryside that way. I started out to get a Masters in Engineering but one came to find that in fact the only people that left it as a Masters were those that were short of time or short of cash or weren't up to doing a PhD. So I applied for, and was granted an extra years leave without pay. Financially we were helped, I got something called a Draper's Scholarship from Queen Mary College. The Draper's Guild being the sponsors of Queen Mary College. So we stayed the extra year and I finished up with a PhD in Structural Engineering working on thin reinforced concrete shell roofs. Ironically having been away for those three years when I came back to Perth the first job I had was on a steel jetty. But as they say it's not what you do in the PhD it's what it does to you. I think that counts - I hope so. It was a very enjoyable and informative time in our life which we look back on with great pleasure.

JL So when you returned to Perth what was - you say going overseas was, you know, sort of opened your eyes or gave you perspective. Was it hard to settle back into Perth?

KELLY No it wasn't really. Although I should say that after three years in England we'd got to the stage where I think we could have lived there for ever but we put a few provisos on it. You know provided you could live out of London in certain areas where the schools would have been good for kids. You started putting provisos on it which you found probably only applied to a very very small proportion of the people in London, in England. But we could have lived there but we were very happy to come back to West Australia. I guess not so happy in some ways that we left England in September and by November we were in Derby. Because when I got back they said, they wanted me to go

north to help finish of the Derby Jetty and also to be resident engineer for the new Broome Jetty. Pam was pregnant for the first time and so we ended up in Derby with her part way through her pregnancy living in a house which was non-air-conditioned. It had ceiling fans and at least they went all night while we were there but it was pretty difficult physically. But the work was interesting. I enjoyed working on the Derby Jetty and then going to Broome. Derby - living in Derby was quite an experience as you can imagine but we still enjoyed it. And our treasured memory of Derby is actually the New Year's Eve party which was always held out at the Derby Leprosarium where the hosts were the staff out there. So Pam and I have been to a New Year's Eve party at the Derby Lep. There's not too many who've done that. I think the Derby Leprosarium closed up a few years later because leprosy had been overcome. But that's one of our memories of Derby. We went to Broome in Easter '64 into a new house that had been built for us there. And it was just the break of the season from the wet season to the dry season that had come to Broome before it had got to Derby. So there was the changing climate. There was the blue turquoise waters of Broome compared with the muddy waters of Derby. And so things really looked up from the first day we were in Broome. Our son Brian was born in the Broome Hospital on July 5, 1964. Pam shared the ward with Gwen Tietzel who was the Methodist Minister's wife who was having her sixth¹³. And she shared the ward with Mrs Caesar who was an Aboriginal woman who was having her twelfth so she had plenty of advice as to how to cope with (laughing) having a baby from some well experienced heads.

JL So does your time that Pam and yourself spent in the North West sounds like a very interesting period of your life.

KELLY Yes indeed it was because it was the time when for the first time I was completely in charge of a major construction in a remote location. It happened to be in Broome which of course is a place which has fascinated people and still does fascinate people. They find Broome a very interesting place. When we arrived there it was at the very bottom of the cycle. The pearling industry had been declining for 40 years and it had been at its full strength before the First World War. It had come back to something before the Second World War. After the World War in the fifties it had climbed up to having about 40 or 50 luggers operating compared with 300 before the First World War. But by the time we got there in '64 it was down to six only luggers and they were involved in the cultured pearl industry. So the mainstay of the town had been declining and was at the very bottom. We arrived in town to build a new jetty which was seen to be an outlet for the meat works which was going to be rebuilt. And it was a deep water jetty where the ships could lie alongside at any stage of the tide. Compared with previously at Wyndham and Derby and Broome [where] the ships had to sit on the bottom at low tide which very much constrained the size of ships that could do just that. In Broome itself the MMA¹⁴, the airlines, had recently ceased stopping at Broome - sorry over-nighting in Broome and it transferred that activity to Derby. The Regional

¹³ Correction – her fourth DK

¹⁴ MMA was short for MacRoberston Miller Airlines (or Mickey Mouse airlines to the locals). Horrie Miller, the original founder of the airline was a resident of Broome and a player at the tennis club. It was an interesting link with the Broome that had once been. DK

Administrator appointed by the government had been located in Derby. A new hospital was being built in Derby and so Broome was feeling really sorry for itself when we arrived in the town. Interestingly enough there was still the remnants of the good old days of the pearling industry. There were still pearling masters that lived in town that we came to know quite well.

They still had their traditional pearling master lifestyle of the large houses with the shady verandahs and shutters and the formal dress of the long white trousers and shirts, long [sleeved] white shirts, as being formal dress as to what you wore if you visited them.¹⁵ But all that was fading away and at that stage being replaced by nothing. When we arrived in town it was into a new house that had been built on a very large block of land, half an acre. It had shutters, it had ceiling fans. We had to have a special converter put in to convert the direct current the town was still on into AC to drive any of our appliances. You could only have a gas fridge because there wasn't enough power for the electric fridge. And so it was a sort of a transitional time that we went. We set about creating a home here and taking our place in sort of Broome society. The first day I went to tennis they asked if I'd be the secretary of the tennis club so I took that over for a year and ended up being president for a couple of years that followed. I found that I was succeeding somebody called Popsy Morgan who was the wife of a pearling master who had taken on that job for 20 years [but recently left town] so I had to learn all that from scratch. Then shortly afterwards I was asked if I would put up for the shire council so I ended up being elected to the shire council which I was on that for about 18 months¹⁶. So we found ourselves right in the middle of the very small Broome society.

JL Do you think that's something that helped make your time there successful that you did engage in all these other activities?

KELLY Yes undoubtedly because you could sort of get in and do something like that and you got to know the people very well. The president of the shire when I went on was Sam Male from the famous Streeter and Male

empire, the pearling empire. So we got to know them very well¹⁷. Still at that time as I mentioned it hadn't changed, Broome hadn't changed for 30 years. When you went into the Streeter and Male's store you still had the sort of clerical people sitting up on these high stools at a high desk, like something out of Dickens. That was still happening in Broome in 1964. Chinatown was still as

¹⁵ White shorts, open neck white shirt and long white socks was the standard evening wear in the Wet. DK

¹⁶ An item on the agenda of almost every council meeting I attended was the forfeiture to Council of blocks of land in town for the non payment of outstanding rates. Council sold off these blocks for 50 pounds or 100 pounds and had trouble in getting buyers at these prices. The blocks would now be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars – and I didn't buy even one of them. DK

¹⁷ Within a few days of arriving I was invited to attend the Race Club busy bee to be held on a Sunday morning. I duly turned up and found myself with paint pot and paint brush on one side of the fence on the final stretch to the finish line. On the other side was Sam Male, the Race Club President. We spent the Sunday morning painting the top rail a brilliant white chatting away. It was certainly a good way to get to know someone and a good way to get into the life of the town. DK

it had been for years and years, although it looked quite good. It was all painted white. I came to observe that it was all painted white except there were some buildings back from the main road that only had sort of white stripes on them. It turned out that the Queen had come to Broome in 1962 so they'd gone round Chinatown and they'd painted all the buildings in the foreground completely and just the bits of buildings in the background that she could see, had been painted white. So it was like a film set (laughing) which was quite incongruous to see it. But that was Broome in 1964 when we went there.

JL And did you have any Aborigines working for you in Broome?

KELLY Yes we did. It was a sort of a momentous time if you like in the sort of development of the Aboriginal situation in that many of them had left the stations where they weren't being paid very much. They came into town and lived on the outskirts of Broome. Quite a number of them actually worked for us at the Broome Jetty. Of our workforce of about maximum 120 we probably had 10 or 20 Aborigines work for us. They only stayed for usually about six or eight weeks and then moved on. Some stayed longer but they tended to only stay for that sort of period of time. So over the couple of years of the construction we sort of cycled lots and lots of Aborigines through the Broome Jetty. So many that in the next five years I could hardly go anywhere in the Kimberley to any of the towns without being greeted warmly by these Aborigines that had all worked on the Broome Jetty. Where of course they were paid just the same as anybody else which I think was something of a new experience in the Kimberley. Although it had been the same situation on the Wyndham Jetty and on the Derby Jetty. We did the same thing in Broome. One thing that I'll always wryly remember is that the word got around that the Aborigines out at the camp on the edge of town were going to put on a corroboree. So we went out there on this Thursday night and it was quite spectacular. One of the particular things that they did was to actually take these fire sticks out of the fire and bang them together and create all these sparks. That was one of their sort of traditional dances that that was done. Yes it was a very successful evening. Lots of people from the town came out to observe this. Then we were told it was going to be repeated the next night so a lot of us went out there on the next night but it was all in darkness and it wasn't on. When we asked, the word was, oh they'd decided they'd go into the pictures instead. So I always thought about that. It was really a sign of the times I guess. The pictures were the main entertainment in Broome, Sun Pictures, which is still there as an historic place, where the white people sat up the back and then down the front in front of the screen where all the Aborigines sat. So it was sort of an example if you like of apartheid which was in Broome in those times. It has all since changed but it was still there in 1964.

END OF TAPE TWO SIDE A

JL So Des what actually brought you to Broome? What was the project?

KELLY It was to build a new jetty at Entrance Point in Broome. A new deep water jetty. As I mentioned previously the ships had to sit on the bottom and this could no longer cope with the size of ships that wanted to come into the Kimberley. The national program had been new ports at Wyndham and Derby and Broome. There was some controversy and rivalry between Derby and Broome as to where the new deep water port should go. There was one site which was just north of Derby at a place called Point Torment and there was another site which was at Entrance Point in Broome. The government had engaged some consulting engineers, I think it was Maunsell and Partners, to do a comparison of the sites. Thankfully they came out and chose Broome as the place for the new deep water port. Because otherwise I would have been posted to Point Torment, 40 miles north of [Derby] around a great tidal flat full with mangroves and sandflies on to a little strip of land that went out into King Sound. A very unattractive site for all sorts of reasons. But they plumped on Broome and that's how we ended going to build the new deep water port at Broome. It was a steel structure that went out from Entrance Point, out into deep water, it was more than a kilometre long. And I built the site office right at the base of the jetty in the building that was to become the lumpers mess. We added on a couple of rooms. So I ended up with a site office that had a 270° view of the blue waters of Broome and the red cliffs. It's got to have been the best site office in the world, it was a spectacular view to behold. The job involved floating the plant, barges, tugs and things which of course was okay except that you had a fantastic rise and fall of the tide. The tide goes up and down about 32 feet, nine or ten metres, twice a day in the spring tides which gives you all sorts of problems with keeping the plant in position. And the other interesting thing was the cyclones because when cyclones came you had to take all of this floating plant and take it up Roebuck Creek and sit it on the bottom up there amongst the mangroves until the cyclone went past. The prediction of cyclones was very crude and so in fact every time we took the barge up the creek it was a false alarm. We never had a decent cyclone while we were in Broome but that didn't stop us taking the stuff up this creek probably six or eight times. And everybody in town got to know there was a cyclone coming when we were towing the barge up the creek. So it was an interesting job technically as well as being - it was \$3.2 million in 1964 dollars so it was quite a substantial task which was successfully completed in a couple of years. It does embrace probably the worst moment I've had in my career in that we'd driven all of the piles in the neck of the jetty and in the head of the jetty successfully, hundreds of them. But we had one thing to do which was to build four navigational aids, each of those comprised of a tripod of piles with a vertical marker on the top. And we did that by taking the pile driving barge out, driving the piles, using the pile driving barge as a platform on which we did the welding, welding the top on. We'd done two of them and we were on the third one. We'd driven the piles and had just joined them together and pulled the barge away from the piles to leave it overnight. During the night an extraordinarily strong wind blew up and unbeknown to us while it was high tide it had taken the barge over the top of the piles which were sitting there. I went into work as usual at half-past-six in the morning and got this radio message

which came in, "We can't find the pile". I looked out the window and there's the finished beacons sitting quite clearly above the water. So I knew what it was, that the barge had drifted over and was sitting on top of this pile with the tide going down. So as we waited and watched - all we could do was just wait and the tide went down and the barge sunk with it. Until finally this tripod appeared poking up through the deck of the barge (which had proceeded) as the barge went down the tripod stuck up further and further through the deck of the barge until it was sticking up maybe three or four metres. All we could do was to cut the piles off, lift them out of the way, wait for the tide to come up until it came over the piles and then tow the barge ashore and sit it on the bottom for quite massive repairs to it. We were lucky in that the pylon came up in the middle of the barge, missed all of the major bits of gear we had on the deck. The barge was made up of a whole series of individual pontoons so it only broke up some of the pontoons so the barge still floated. But it was right in the middle so it floated evenly and towed it ashore and took us three weeks to fix it up and put it back. However, that period of waiting while the tide went down and the barge sat on the beacon is something that I will remember forever.

JL So how do you deal with that sort of situation when something goes wrong like that with your superiors or... how does that...?

KELLY They... we told them of course straightaway as soon as we could. But I guess that was accepted as being - these things happen, you know with the best planning in the world. The anchor had dragged. That was the fascinating thing about harbour works I suppose is that you had all these unknowns with dragging anchors and sand banks and you know all those sort of things which were sort of factors that made your philosophies in accuracy and all those things so much more difficult in the marine environment than it is on dry land. The tide doesn't go out on dry land so you don't have that problem.

JL It's so very much that experience dealing with the sea and those unknown things has probably kept you more on your metal than it would have been in other circumstances.

KELLY Yes it certainly kept you... the marine environment kept you on your metal and I guess it does something to you. And it does something to people who work over the water just like - I noticed this later on when I got into the mining industry. There's something about underground mining that affects people. People who stay with it, who end up being underground mining managers and superintendents and that sort of thing, are sort of special sort of people who have been through it. They're all the time calculating risk versus what you're trying to do. And they become, yes, I think pretty complete people because that's what their life has been.

JL Recording session on the 25 March 2004 finished at this point.

This series of interviews was recorded for the Department of Premier and Cabinet and Institute of Public Affairs Australia, WA Division, on the 1 April 2004 with Dr Des Kelly at his home at 21 Pandora Drive, City Beach. The interviewer is Juliet Ludbrook.

JL Des, last time we were talking you described your experiences up the north west and then from '64 to '66 you were in Broome. Why did you leave Broome – what happened there?

KELLY Well the job had been completed. We'd had the first ship come into the Broome Jetty, to the new Broome Jetty. It was one of the Bakke boats that in those days would travel from Fremantle up to south-east Asia. We'd also had a grand opening of the Broome Jetty presided over by the Premier of the day, David Brand¹⁸. The job was virtually finished and I was transferred from there back to Perth [leaving my engineering colleague Michael Paul to finish the job]. That was August 1966 that Pam and I and our one¹⁹ year old son Brian came back to the metropolitan area to live. I didn't know it at the time but it was really the end of the construction part of my career which of course had started as a cadet in 1951 and had been punctuated by the three years that I had spent in the UK. I'd gone from being a Cadet Engineer through Grade 3 to Grade 2, and actually on coming back to Perth I was promoted to a Grade 1 Engineer on a salary of some \$6,700 per annum. What I didn't appreciate at the time is that I'd observed a change in the Public Works and I guess the public service in that respect in that depending upon which government was in place you had very much a promotion [or otherwise] of day labour. That is, the Public Works doing its own work. Where if the Liberal Country Party Coalition was in, it was more a moving to doing work by contract. I'd seen the State Engineering Works of Western Australia be very bloated at one stage where all work had to be done by the State Engineering Works [with specific directions that it] could not be done by private industry; to the State Engineering Works becoming very lean and hungry indeed when work could be done elsewhere. In fact, a few years later the State Engineering Works just phased out of operation and disappeared. While I was in Broome in the beginnings of the job I'd had a visit from the minister of the day and I didn't know till afterwards but they were actually teetering on a decision to do Broome by contract rather than by day labour which I was shaping up to do it. It was because a New Zealand construction company run by somebody called "Big Eric Clements" who was going to rebuild the Broome Meat Works had also offered to build the Broome Jetty at the same time. Now the decision was taken at a political level to do it by day labour and hence that's why I stayed and had the job to do in that '64, '65, '66 period. So I'd observed this sort of the beginnings of a change in the Public Works Department. It was also a change in direction of my own career where up until that time I'd been just concentrating on a construction engineer

¹⁸ On the day of the opening Broome was on its very best behaviour. The ladies of the town volunteered to supply floral decorations for the opening ceremony and these turned out to be long sprays of bougainvillea in large white painted stone jars. The jars had originally contained soy sauce imported into Broome in bulk to meet the needs of the largely Asian population. The flowers looked very elegant and added a touch of class to the opening in a way that could only happen in Broome. DK

¹⁹ Correction – 'two year old' DK

type of career. And having got back to Perth I was transferred into the executive of the Public Works Department in a small group that worked directly for the Director of Engineering who was John Parker - later Sir John Parker. And we were working on the co-ordination of the development of the new iron ore projects which were coming into being. So I was moving away from construction into administration, away from pure engineering as a career and I had some misgivings about this.

JL What were they?

KELLY Well, it's sort of at the time there was a bit of an attitude that if you were an engineer you stayed in engineering. It was somehow almost letting the side down to move into management and move away from the pure engineering. Of course no other profession seemed to have those inhibitions but engineering did to a certain extent. I was actually offered a job by a private consulting firm called Halpern Glick and Lewis. They offered me \$8,000 a year compared with the \$6,700 that I was getting at the time. It was an opportunity to stay right in pure engineering but after reflection I decided not to go. I thought that the opportunities within the Public Works Department were there so I stayed. I guess that turned out on reflection to have been the right decision. John Parker heading up this Planning and Co-ordinating Authority which was a committee of all of the heads of the relevant government departments was doing this job as well as being Director of Engineering of the Public Works. But in his role as Chairman of the Planning and Co-ordinating Authority he was answering directly to Charles Court as Minister for Industrial Development. As distinct from answering on Public Works matters through the Undersecretary of Works to the Minister for Works. So it was rather a strange situation but I think it was really a reflection of the power and dominance and presence of Charles Court in the government of that time. He'd actually picked up and was running with the development of the major iron ore industry instead of that being done by the Mines Department and the Minister for Mines, Charles Court, was doing it as an industrial development. So we had a very interesting time co-ordinating the other government departments under the auspices of this Planning and Co-ordinating Authority so it could respond properly to the new developments when you had something like an iron ore development. And one example at the time was the Mt Newman Iron Ore Operation. It had to develop a mine but also a mine town and a 253 mile railway and a port town and a port. All of these activities required land and water and the other services that the State usually provided but in a fairly slow way of doing it which was adequate for the normal development of the State but didn't meet the needs of the iron ore development. So this small group within the Public Works Department including really my mentor I suppose, a fellow called Eddie Gorham, who was senior to me, and he was in charge of this little group and we had this co-ordination role which was interesting indeed. The Mt Newman project was sort of formally kicked off on April the 1st 1967. And two years later on April 1st, April Fools Day 1969 it came into being, and we had a very heavy involvement in that. While that was happening we were based actually in the Public Works Department building in Dumas House [opposite King's Park]. But in 1970 we moved out of Dumas House into BP House which is the top end of the Terrace. John Parker who had been Director of Engineering had retired from that position to be the

Chairman of the Planning and Co-ordinating Authority and he led the group down to BP House. Subsequently he retired and Don Munro became Chairman. We were there carrying on the same role of co-ordination of development until there was a change of government in February 1971. The Labor Government of the day, and the Minister was Herbie Graham, decided that he wanted to as it were formalise this arrangement. So he moved us to the Department of Industrial Development which was based in the Superannuation Building which is now called the May Holman Building in St George's Terrace. Our chief, Don Munro, became head of the Department of Industrial Development. It had a development wing which was headed by Eddie Gorham and I was part of that group. The existing Department of Industrial Development was an industries wing that continued to do what had already been done [fostering secondary and service industries]. So really over those years I'd moved from being from the Public Works Department into the Department of Industrial Development separated from Public Works Department.

JL Were there any aspects of that change that stuck in your mind? The culture of the two different departments or the way that it was run or the way you felt... did you feel more comfortable in one area than the other?

KELLY Well I think that in some ways the Public Works Department and all other government departments at that stage had been through 50 or 60 years of almost declining activity in Western Australia. The mining industry, the gold mining industry had declined from the turn of the century. The agricultural industry had developed quite quickly after the turn of the century but it had almost plateaued out. Secondary industry was quite small. The only major development that there had been had been the BP Refinery at Cockburn Sound which had been very significant because in one fell swoop it doubled the amount of investment that there had been in secondary industry. But the State had been very slow indeed. Didn't have to respond to investment from overseas and so really wasn't very good at it. What we observed in coming from Public Works into the Department of Industrial Development, and particularly observing the approach that Charles Court had in relation to investment and development, that the State had to be much more responsive to these things than it had been in the past otherwise those developments would have just passed us by. So there was certainly a change in culture in the area that I was in. I've got to say that other areas of government were probably slower to respond but they certainly did change in the seventies and eighties under the same pressures that we had.

JL And were you conscious of that time? Was there a certain excitement about being in that industrial development area that...?

KELLY Yes, yes there was. I suppose you've got to say that it was Charles Court that engendered that excitement and was aware of the importance it could be to the State. We were all imbued with that and I suppose very much enjoyed not being directly involved in the development ourselves, but being involved in this co-ordination role that brought these things about. For example the Port of Port Hedland which had been a very small port where

ships of very limited size can go into them had to be developed so that it was an international iron ore port [comprising of a very large dredged channel that had [been built by] the biggest dredge in the world that went out to sea some 15 or 20 miles, the development of the inner harbour with all these new facilities. It was, you know, a very exciting time indeed. Those first shipments of iron ore out of Port Hedland in 1966 and then with the Mt Newman Project in '69 were significant developments that we were very happy to be part of.

JL Des could you tell me why the DID, Department of Industrial Development changed its name to DDD?

KELLY Well, Department of Industrial Development had been very much the brainchild of, and had the support of, Charles Court when he'd been in government. But with the changing government in 1971 and the change of minister, the new Labour Government was imbued with this concept of decentralisation. And so Department of Industrial Development changed its name to the Department of Development in Decentralisation. With a further change of government in the mid-seventies it came back to a new name which was Department of Resources Development. And, in fact subsequently over the years it became the Department of State Development and then came back to being the Department of Resources Development when I was there again from 1992²⁰ to '99. So really the name reflected the philosophy of the government which was in power at the time.

JL Did those changes... how did those changes influence you or did you working so closely there did that have any affect on your working life or the way you viewed your work?

KELLY No, really the activity that we were doing didn't change. This was very much a co-ordination of developments. And over the balance of the seventies there was in some ways more of the same, more iron ore developments. There was Bauxite Alumina, there was the emergence of the Yeelirrie Uranium Project which by the way I just noticed in today's paper has just been formally abandoned as a project. It was very much a prospect in those days and in fact it never really got off the ground and I see it just being abandoned at the moment due to government policy. But there was also nickel projects. You had the emergence of Kambalda. But the one that we got particularly involved in was the Poseidon Development which involved the redevelopment of Laverton township. And there was Bauxite Alumina, perhaps as I mentioned, which had its own particular problems. So during the seventies there was more an expansion of interest into other minerals as they were developed in the State.

JL Just getting to the more personal reaction though. If you suddenly find out that your department has changed its name, and may be it's a slight philosophy of where it's going. How does that affect you in your day to day working life?

²⁰ Correction: 1993 DK

KELLY Well not much although I must say it probably brings a different dimension to what you're doing. As you see what the government policy is you then try and relate what you're doing to it. I suppose how it did affect my own career is that in the seventies I was made a Chairman of the Regional Development Committee, the Pilbara Regional Development Committee which comprised representatives of the community and representatives of the local government in the Pilbara Region. One met with this committee every three months or so in different parts of the Pilbara trying to work out how the community could develop, could benefit from the resource development which was going all around them. This was part of the governments I guess decentralisation thrusts so that to that extent one did become involved directly in the policy. I quite enjoyed that experience. In later years, the latter part of the seventies, I was Chairman of the South West Regional Development Committee which was a sort of a similar activity in the sou' west where you had the impact of mineral sands mining and bauxite mining and the coal mining on the community and one was trying to gain benefits from that.

JL Des in the areas that you've been working in there have been a number of changes and I was wondering if you could tell us how you coped personally with those changes or the people around you coped with change?

KELLY Mmm. There's been change in the public service right throughout the entire time that I've been through it. And you do observe the way that some organisations can actually cope with change and some individuals can cope with change and others can't. I guess the first example of this was when the Planning and Co-ordinating Authority was formed in those late sixties where other government departments, the heads of other government departments, were required to actually be part of a co-ordinating committee which is headed up by a co-ordinator of development. So they instead of being, you might say entirely in command and control of what they did and responsible to only one minister, suddenly found that they were part of a co-ordinating group that they had to answer to which was through a chairman and to another minister. Some heads of department reacted well to that and were co-operative and coped with it. Others were very defensive and saw it as an invasion of their particular territory. What you found was that those who resisted the change and couldn't co-operate inevitably they were overtaken and by-passed and put aside. Governments are able to overcome any difficulties of this nature simply by by-passing the obstruction, and one saw quite a lot of that. That was examples of people who actually as heads of department who couldn't, couldn't accept the changes. I was actually, you might say, part of the group that tended to join others but go alongside and on top of the other organisation. So part of the 'new wave' if you like. Therefore we were imposing change on others rather than having the change imposed on us. So that I was in a particularly special position I suppose in that respect. When you came down to the individual levels again you found that some people could adapt to the change. Others just resisted it totally and they were inevitably by-passed and set aside because you just have to have change because the world out there is changing with you so that's what I observed over that time.

JL As someone who was more involved in making the changes happen so to speak, were there any qualities that you felt that you had that were useful in this work that you were doing – particular quality?

KELLY I think it was because I hadn't actually been involved for that long in a static organisation and therefore I hadn't you might say picked up those attitudes. When I went to the Mines Department in 1980 it was to a department that had virtually been unchanged for 80 years. It had had the same role for most of that time the actual industry had been declining –as the gold mining industry declined. But then with the burst of activity in the mining industry which sort of started in the fifties and strengthened in the sixties and was very strong in the seventies it hadn't been able to cope with that new burst of activity because it hadn't changed. So I think when I went to the Mines Department in 1980 I set about trying to change the culture of that organisation to cope with the world that we were then in. Whereas the organisation had really almost ossified for quite some time.

JL How did you go about that? Specifically.

KELLY Well I actually picked up very much on something the public service was doing [at] that time which was getting into corporate planning. Which was really a process whereby an organisation involved all its people in identifying what was the role of the department? Who were the people it was supposed to be serving? What did you do? How did you know when you had succeeded? What were the outcomes that you were trying to find? And so I went through this process essentially over and over again within the Department of Mines, and progressively people's attitudes changed as they were almost annually involved in this soul-searching process of trying to say, what are we doing? Have we got there? Are our customers happy? All that sort of thing. Now that was something that was unheard of in the public service in the fifties, sixties, seventies. It was really the eighties that that started to happen within the public service.

END OF TAPE THREE SIDE A

JL Des one of the things that you mentioned in the work that you were involved in in the seventies was Town Site's Development. Would you like to expand on that?

KELLY When these major developments were inevitably going to happen there were all these demands from the companies for new town sites and new townships. This was an area that was very difficult to provide what they needed. Up until that time in the State anywhere in a town site the actual growth had tended to be incremental – a few blocks a year. And we hadn't had that experience of creating over a period of two years a totally new town site, township for 1500 or 2000 people. The Planning and Co-ordinating Authority formed a Town Site's Development Committee. I was a prominent member of that Town Site's Development Committee and actually chaired it in subsequent years. The members of that committee were representatives from Town Planning Department, Water Supply, Sewerage, Roads, Electricity, all the services in the township. This committee really directed a process of identifying a piece of land which was provided to us by the Lands Department representative. We organised a plan, then put in all the services, and that was then available for the mining company to put its people in. The isolated townships like Newman and Paraburdoo and Tom Price were actually done by the companies themselves. But what they intended to do was approved by this Town Site's Development Committee. But places on the coast which were the so-called open townships like Port Hedland and Laverton [historic inland mining towns] were ones that were actually developed with the [Townsite Development Committee as] developer of that land on behalf of the State. I guess perhaps the most successful one is Karratha which when we first got involved was just vacant land on a pastoral station. We went through all of that process which also included not just providing the land but arranging for the schools and the hospitals and the police stations, which were often paid for by the mining companies but put in by the State and staffed by the State. One other success story was very much Karratha which has grown into quite a vibrant township at this stage. One of the most interesting was Laverton which had to be redeveloped for the Mt Windarra Project. Laverton of course was a historic mining town but by the time we got involved it had shrunk back to just a hotel and a store and maybe half-a-dozen houses. There was a case of acquiring all of the land in the township, redeveloping it for the mining company which mined at Mt Windarra but actually the workers lived in Laverton itself. It had a local authority. A fellow called John McPherson was the Chairman of that local authority. We had to work very closely with him in redeveloping the township. One of the interesting things was actually how to provide for the Aborigines who were in the area. Who had lived in various camps on the fringe of the old Laverton. And there when it came to the planning we had conflicting advice from different people who had the Aborigines' welfare at heart. One group of people said that for equity purposes the houses for the Aborigines should be scattered, "pepper and salt", throughout the township. Another equally well meaning group said, no, you had to put them in an enclave where they could be self-supporting to one another to cope with the change. So there you had as it were totally conflicting advice as to what we should do. I think we ended up compromising and doing a bit of both. But it did give to me an illustration of, I guess, the difficulties in trying to provide for Aborigines in a development like

that. It did seem to work quite well for a while. I remember going back a couple of years later [noting that] with some support which was being given to the Aboriginal people who had gone into the township it seemed to be going very well. A few years later when I enquired I found that in fact it hadn't been as successful as we had all hoped. I'm not sure what were the changes that had brought that about. But the development of Laverton was really a very interesting one. One of the unsuccessful ones in some ways was South Hedland where the planning advice that we had really didn't work. It ended up being a circular sort of development which might have been appropriate for underground power with brick houses placed on the ground but with overhead power and with fibro asbestos houses placed on low stumps. It didn't really work and South Hedland proved to be a difficult problem for some years. I was happy to be involved almost just before I retired in a South Hedland Enhancement Scheme where State money and company money went in. It was quite a substantial amount of money went in. It was co-ordinated by someone called Robyn Crane, who is a woman, who'd previously been President of the Shire of Karratha. She'd taken over this job and actually co-ordinated the enhancement of South Hedland and it really was a good job. The last I saw of it it had been quite successful and it had really raised the tone of South Hedland. So township development was I guess an experience which brought me fairly close to local government who had to cope with and administer what we left behind as a developed township. I came to appreciate the difficult role that local government has in these things.

JL Des through the late sixties, seventies, eighties there is a period of rapid promotion that you obviously enjoyed. Would you like to list those and then perhaps tell us why you've... what qualities did you have that facilitated this promotion?

KELLY As I mentioned when we came back from Broome in '66 I was promoted to what amounts to a Level Three on some \$6,700 a year. In 1970 I was promoted to Senior Engineer, and then in '71 promoted further to a strange title, Principal Assistant Development at Level 6 and that was a salary of \$13,690. In '74 I became Deputy Co-ordinator, that was a Level 9 and I stayed at that level until I left the department, that's the Department of Industrial Development, in 1980. I think it was a period of opportunity that that was the main reason that brought that about. There was the opportunity there to, I guess, demonstrate that you could make things happen. That you could relate to other people, gain their co-operation in doing things, understand the problems of local government and take notice of those and generally, I think, to relate to companies and the people there. So I would think that it's the qualities of communication and being able to influence people that are important in that sort of a job. And that period gave me the opportunity to demonstrate those things.

JL Des it's not always easy or straightforward to convince people about the way things should be or how things should be changed. Is there any incident that you could recall that you remember was perhaps a little bit difficult, a bit more challenging than others?

KELLY I do recall going with members of the Town Site's Development Committee to Point Samson and there was a fellow called, Bill Miller, who was the uncrowned king of Point Samson. He ran a restaurant out there and generally was very influential. I can still remember going to his little restaurant and going through a darkened archway out into the verandah beyond just expecting to see Bill Miller there for a meeting. When we came through this darkened archway and out into the sunshine there was about 30 people who'd all been assembled to witness Bill Miller asking us very difficult questions. I must say I was put to the test that day to answer the questions that he was asking and to generally mollify this group of very hostile people who had some particular problem – I forget what it was. I can always recall the moment of consternation when being confronted by all these people totally unexpectedly. Those sort of situations did happen when you're doing that sort of job. Hostile councils, hostile groups of people that you had to sort of talk to. I do recall one incident which I will always treasure and that is we were going with the Minister of the day who was Les Logan, who was the Minister for Local Government. One or two of us were with Les Logan going to the Shire of Roebourne which included all that area of the West Kimberley²¹, Karratha, Wickham, Roebourne [and Dampier]. We had to convince the Shire of Roebourne that it should dissolve and hand over its responsibilities to an administrator, a government appointed administrator. We briefed Les Logan on what to say which was very much a difficult thing to do because he had to persuade these people who had been in charge who felt their responsibilities keenly to resign. We went into this meeting and Les Logan did exactly the opposite to what we'd told him to say. He absolutely fouled up this careful brief that we had given him as to what he should say which in our view [we expected it] would have made all of these people totally hostile and reject the proposition. The way he put it across all of them thought, [contrary to our expectations] that Les Logan is a really good guy. If Les says we should resign, well we will resign, and they did exactly that. I'm quite sure if I had tried to do it, it would have been open warfare. But just the way this person, Les Logan, handled the situation was absolutely a master piece as far as I was concerned. I tried to remember those lessons later but often whether you can persuade people depends upon the view that they form of you. And if they get the view that you're a bit too clever well they'll often, almost out of principle, not go along with what you say so that personal relationship is a very important thing. Les Logan had it. I remembered that lesson in years that came later.

JL Yes because you'd have working as you did out in the field so to speak with all manner of different people, organisations, you would have been continually coming up against people with different backgrounds, different cultures. Was that part of the interest that you had in the job?

KELLY Yes the work that we did and particularly that role as Chairman of the Pilbara Regional Development Committee, where on your committee you had pastoralists and business people from Port Hedland and these different

²¹ Correction: West Pilbara DK

sort of people. It was really very interesting to get to know them, to get to know what they were about, and I certainly enjoyed that very much.

JL Des in 1980 you were appointed as Undersecretary of Mines. Now this was a little bit unusual in your case wasn't it?

KELLY Yes, I'd been in the Department of Industrial Development - whatever it was called - for about 10 years. They had advertised for a new Undersecretary for Mines and had not been satisfied with the outcome of that process. It was suggested to me that when they advertise the next time I might think about applying. So that's what made me apply to be Undersecretary for Mines in 1980. One of the reasons that it hadn't crossed my mind was that up until that time, not only in the Mines Department but in the Public Works Department and in most other government departments, the undersecretary which had been very much a, almost a colonial title, answered straight to the minister. And it was not usual for professional people from within the department to actually aspire to that position. So it had [been in] the Public Works Department where there'd been an undersecretary, but there'd been a director of engineering that headed up one of the divisions who was probably paid more than the undersecretary. But he did not formally respond directly to the minister, that was always done through the undersecretary. So I applied and ended up being appointed. And so I think for the first time you actually had a professional person appointed as undersecretary, certainly Undersecretary for Mines, and I believe other departments were the same.

JL How did that feel when you realised you had the position?

KELLY Well, it was so different to what I'd been doing. The Department of Industrial Development had been very much a growing and developing and changing role. And then one ended up in the Mines Department which was a statutory body that very much regulated acts of parliament and had a regulatory role, and didn't have a promotional role or a co-ordinating role or any of these things I'd been doing. So it was very much a change for me and took just a little time to settle down and decide well, what was I going to try and do with this new department.

JL So what was the attraction of applying?

KELLY Well, I guess the opportunity was there to be head of a department. The other thing was it was the mining industry which I could see was already starting to develop quite rapidly and that it was going to be, as it were, the industry of the future. So that to be associated with the mining industry was going to be you might say associated with the strength of the State. So it was the area of State activity to get into. In the past you'd had perhaps the agricultural industry was the growing industry in the part of the State to get involved in. But at that particular time it was the mining industry and so that's why I was happy very much to get involved in it.

JL And you were undersecretary and then subsequently Director General of the Department of Minerals and Energy - that was your title?

KELLY Yes it started off as Undersecretary for the Department of Mines and that was at an S2 level, a Special 2. It so happened that about two years later when I was still a Special 2, the head of the Department of Resources Development that had previously been the Department of Industrial Development [became vacant]. In other words my previous boss he retired so there was the opportunity of going back to DRD as head of the department that I'd left only two or three years previously. I was attracted to that in that it was a higher level, it was a Special 4, and it was in an area that I knew very well. In the process of the advertisement and calling for applications my position at Mines Department was upgraded to an S4 so from that point of view there was no reason to change. I also must say I felt that I was only just getting into doing with the Department of Mines what I thought could be done so I ended up withdrawing my application for the position back at DRD and stayed with the Mines Department as an S4 position. The title was subsequently changed from Undersecretary to Director General and it was later raised to a Special 5 in the hierarchy of heads of various departments. Even later still of course those titles were changed back to Chief Executive Officer and so those titles all disappeared in due course.

JL Did that change come in was it 1993, the Chief Executive Officer?

KELLY It was let me think. I'd been there a couple of years so it must have been about '83.

JL Oh sorry.

KELLY 1983.²²

JL So how long were you in that position then?

KELLY Well then I stayed at Mines Department having you might say drawn back from the opportunity of changing in '83, I then stayed in the Mines Department until 1993. I was there for twelve-and-a-half years.

JL Oh so that's when you went back to the Department of Resources Development is that right?

KELLY Yes. I was there until that time. The Mines Department was an interesting place because it had all these various activities that it was doing by people of different professions and so one found that there were actually nine divisions at the Mines Department doing all different things. There was a Geological Survey with about 100 geologists involved in the geological mapping of the State which wasn't just used for mining purposes but also geological information underlays all the planning of roads and harbours and all those things and so that was a very important role. There was a Petroleum Division which administered the petroleum tenements both onshore and

²² JL (interviewer) and I were at cross-purposes here. The title changed from Under Secretary to Director General in about 1982 or 1983. The title of CEO applied to the position of Head of DRD when I began there in 1993. DK

offshore. And you remember the petroleum industry was just really emerging in those times. There had been the initial discoveries of oil in '53. There had been the substantial discoveries of gas in '72 and there'd just been a recent commitment to developing the North West Shelf so that was another very important area. And also petroleum safety was an area of responsibility. There was a chemistry centre which had been there for a very long time with over 100 chemists in it which was involved in providing chemical advice to the Police Department, in regards to forensic work, to the Agriculture Department and to the Department of Environment. And so that all of these departments looked to us for chemical advice. We had a group that specialised on royalty collection. We in fact in 1980 had a review of royalties and raised them up to ensure that the State was getting a proper return from the development of all these non-renewable resources. There was a Mining Engineering Division which was responsible for safety in mines and that was a particular issue that was of great importance and of interest to me. We had a group that was called Explosives and Dangerous Goods which was responsible for the transport and storage of explosives and dangerous goods throughout Western Australia to try and protect the public from that particular danger. There was the very historical Mining Registration Group which actually provided the mining tenements on which prospectors and explorers had historically gone out and obtained a tenement, pegged out a tenement on which they then explored for gold and other minerals. Then there was quite a large mapping group that was actually involved in surveying of the tenements, the mining tenements, and providing a whole system of plans so that anybody could go in and see on a plan all of the mining tenements that there were in Western Australia. So it was a very diverse group. And I found it interesting to deal with these various disciplines that all thought differently about problems and try and get them all to be working towards a sort of common aim which was the service that the department provided to the people of Western Australia. So we went through that corporate planning process that I mentioned and identified the things that we were trying to do. I found that to be a very happy experience and we ended up documenting what we were trying to do and the things we were trying to achieve. Getting everybody pulling in the same direction was really quite a challenge and it was a very interesting task.

END OF TAPE THREE SIDE B

This interview was recorded for the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Institute of Public Affairs Australia, WA Division, on 1 April 2004 with Dr Des Kelly at his home at 21 Pandora Drive, City Beach. The interviewer is Juliet Ludbrook.

JL Des you have mentioned that during the time you were with the Mines Department there were a number of particular challenges that you had to meet. What were they?

KELLY Well, I think the first one was to really crystallise what the department was trying to do. I think it's encapsulated in some words that we adopted at that time which was: "The Department was responsible for promoting the orderly exploration and development of minerals and petroleum in Western Australia. The Department also provided a scientific and technological information base which fostered the mineral and petroleum industry, protected community standards in safety, and aided long range planning and decision making by government." Which all seems straightforward enough. But when I arrived there in 1980 there was something of a crisis in regard to the very basic function of the department which was to provide mining tenements for applicants to explore and develop. There was a backlog of some 35,000 applications and the capacity of the department was that it could handle about five or 8,000 a year. So that instead of being able to grant mining tenements within two or three months which was the aim, it was years before people could actually get their mining tenements. So we had to initiate a whole series of changes to procedures, to try and reduce this backlog. We could only do so much because we were still working under the old mining act that had been in place since 1904. What was needed was a new mining act which had in fact been worked upon since 1972 but wasn't yet in place. So we took these initial emergency measures to streamline procedures to reduce the backlog as quickly as we could but also got on to the actual introduction and adoption of the new mining act which happened in 1982. And so that was a very busy busy couple of years. The new mining act which came in had been a very difficult process and at times there had been headlines in the *Kalgoorlie Miner* about 'blood in the sand' and all sorts of other dramatic titles about what would happen if the new mining act were introduced in the form that it then was. It went through about three different attempts to get it through parliament. In 1972 it was introduced and knocked back. In 1975 they introduced a changed act which was knocked back. In 1978 they came in [to Parliament with] the version that we were dealing with which was amended while it was in front of parliament, and as I say was finally adopted in 1982. So we then had the challenge of actually introducing this hotly contested legislation into the industry and promoting it and having it accepted. So that was another quite interesting sort of a challenge. Both of those were successful and the backlog of mining tenements were overcome.

JL In that work that you did there were there any times where you had to promote things that you didn't fully agree with?

KELLY Oh yes, I'd say that one particular issue that the department didn't agree with that's universally [opposed within the Department] but it was

government policy and we just had to adopt it. That was the policy of the way farming land is treated as distinct from pastoral land and vacant crown land. The new mining act really consolidated something which had come into being and that was that really the act did not apply effectively over private farming land whereas the purists in the Mines Department and the mining industry said that it should. So that I guess was a point of policy that we just had to accept.

JL Did you ever find that difficult to do that sort of thing? To implement something that you didn't agree with personally?

KELLY No, I always really took the view that you had to be pragmatic about these things. It was better to achieve something than to stand firm on some particular point and you know die on the point of principle. It didn't really do anybody any good and so one did one's best to influence things but then had to accept what was the decision of government.

JL There was never any time that you felt that you'd be prepared to say put your job on the line against these decisions?

KELLY No. No. There was never any point of principle that I felt was worth dying for. One thing I did come to learn quite a deal in government is that you actually get these conflicting principles. A principle that works perfectly in 80 percent of cases but there's 20 percent of cases where it conflicts with some other sort of principle. You get these conflicts which in the way that you go, you know, is right in one sense and wrong in another. You find this a great deal and it's around. Commonwealth Government policies on taxation as it applies to the mining industry often was appropriate for New South Wales and Victoria but when you came to outback Western Australia it just didn't apply. A classic example of that was they had a policy about Fringe Benefits Tax which they abolished. The mining companies were providing housing for employees on mine sites and they could do that economically because they were getting some benefits under a fringe benefit tax. You change the law for some particular reason it suits things in New South Wales and Victoria but the effect of that was that mining companies could no longer build houses on mine sites. And that was the beginning of the introduction of the fly in and fly out arrangements which has got quite some social impacts. Maybe better maybe worse but quite an important social impact. So that you get the situation where we are today where people tend to live in Perth and the workers fly to and from mine sites for a period. In other words the fly in, fly out arrangements instead of actually having mining towns. Often there were those sort of things that where principles were applied and adopted which worked in most cases but could have some very unfortunate implications when you got back to outback Western Australia. And you had to learn to accept those things and try and work around them.

JL Yes, you were actually talking about the challenges that you had in that period you were at the Mines Department and I sort of led you away from that for a moment.

KELLY Well, I've talked about the backlog of mining tenements which was the first challenge that I came upon. Another one which took a lot of time and effort and concern was actually safety in the mining industry where historically the mining industry was viewed as unsafe. And like all other industry, injuries and deaths in mines had sort of been accepted by the community as something that just happened. Now the big changes from almost the fifties onwards was that worker safety and safety in mines were very important issues and you no longer could accept that it was inevitable that people were going to be injured at their place of work. This had been an industrial issue as well as, you might say a pure safety issue, so that you in fact had the union movement who were keen to take the mining safety activities out of the Mines Department and put it into a general state-wide worker safety activity. We were convinced it was far better to have mine worker safety as part of the Mines Department which could relate directly to the mining industry rather than the activity being taken away from us. So there was that pressure which made us have to demonstrate that we could look after safety in mines better than anyone.²³ There was also a change in philosophy which was going on arising out of a major report in England by Lord Robens, which was really saying with regards to safety: you can't have policemen who have to police the activities on mine sites and only allow them to act in a certain way. You have to actually get the mining industry itself to take responsibility for their workers and [for the Department] to have an educational role rather than a policeman's role. This was the change that we were trying to bring about in the eighties and nineties. At the same time reducing the actual injuries and deaths in the mining industry. It was very difficult because the mining industry was growing so quickly, the number of workers coming into the industry was increasing and there was a high turnover of them. And so you had inexperienced workers in underground and open-cut situations which are quite hazardous in themselves. We were able to achieve a reduction in injuries and in reduction of deaths overall. We had some bad moments during that time. It's a very erratic sort of thing, you believe that you've got the answer [but we still have some way to go]. We didn't have a death at one stage for 10 months in a mine and then it was followed by a number in just a few months. So as I say it's an erratic thing which was quite stressful in trying to follow and achieve success in it.

JL How personally would you have taken that sort of event?

KELLY Every death in a mine was communicated to me whenever it took place whether it was in the middle of the night or at any time. And so I was quite close to the State Mining Engineer whose direct responsibility [it] was during that period as we tried to wrestle with this particular problem and it has been successful. Safety in mines now is much much much better than it was. No-one there is going to be satisfied until it's eliminated entirely but that is a

²³ We tried to explain that the Mine Safety Act had been born out of decades of experience of regulating safety in hazardous mining situations. We pointed out that our Act provided for "workmen's inspectors of mines" who were workers elected by their peers in the industry who joined the Inspectorate and spent their time inspecting minesites and looking after the welfare of the workers. There was no equivalent of this in the general safety legislation applying to other non-mining worksites and was one of the reasons we put forward as to why we were best at looking after the mining industry. DK

very difficult thing to achieve. It's a bit like road safety. We shouldn't accept any deaths on roads but there are and how you bring about the change is the challenge which we faced in the mining industry. So that was one that took a lot of time and took a lot of nervous energy I suppose. One of the other things was interesting to observe was the emergence of the environmental ethic over the years where I guess words like 'ecology' had never been - I couldn't spell it in 1972! But over the years one became more and more involved as the environmental movement [ethic] was applied particularly to the mining industry. We always felt that we were being you might say singled out for special treatment because from our view the greatest environmental impact had come from farming and forestry. The actual impact of the mining industry had been relatively smaller. Not that there wasn't a lot to do because there was. And I think it's true to say that the Mines Department and the mining industry picked up this environmental considerations quickly and really applied themselves to it. We ended up having, I think, an outstanding performance in protection of the environment from the impact of the mining industry. Before you started to dig a mine you had to work out how you were going to rehabilitate the area and what it was going to be like when you left it. A classic example of this was really the bauxite mining in the Darling Range fairly close to Perth which in the seventies was really the subject of a great deal of public criticism. Alcoa really took it to heart. They adopted the best practice to rehabilitate areas. But on top of that they set about communicating their successes to the public. And I don't know if you remember but they had ways where groups of people could be taken up to a mine site to see the rehabilitation and those sort of things. Interestingly over a period of five or eight years the actual public criticism of mining, bauxite mining, decreased and the actual support of the industry increased quite dramatically. It has been interesting that just in more recent times the bauxite industry seems to have forgotten those lessons it learnt back in the seventies and there is a re-emergence of conflict in the community. Hopefully they'll re-learn the lessons that they first learnt in the seventies and overcome those problems.

JL Working within the public service how did you cope with criticism that people looking at the public service tend to sort of criticise public servants in various ways. Did you ever find that upsetting at all?

KELLY Oh, one certainly found it upsetting and unfair but in most of the time I was there [we were not required to respond directly] - and it was a gradual change [to the situation where the Department could respond in any way]. I mean to begin with and certainly in the eighties when I was head of the Mines Department it wasn't required of you, nor did you ever make any public statements. That was the minister's job so that all the time you were briefing the minister who had to respond to the public criticism. What's happened since the eighties and nineties and now is that they're trying to get government departments to communicate directly with the community to give out more information. I think it's the right thing to do but it's totally different to what it was when I started in the Mines Department in 1980.

JL Yes well was it ever... did you ever find it sort of frustrating not being able to communicate how you saw things?

KELLY Yes. Yes, very frustrating. Even things like the safety in mines that I mentioned that you could have the Trades and Labour Council or individual unions publicly criticising our efforts of mine safety. There were answers which the minister didn't feel it was appropriate to actually project so you just had to - you just had to take it, that was part of it. You had to try and overcome it some other way.

JL So there would be sometimes more information that you felt that would allay some of this criticism but you weren't able to do anything about it?

KELLY No, not just responding directly. But I set about getting these various committees going which involved the unions and involved the companies. They were essentially committees that looked at what the Mines Department was doing. Looked at the policy changes that we were making, and we endeavoured to get their concerns addressed before we actually formally changed the act or changed the policy or did these things. I had a - hell, it was a bit of a joke really that we had MILC and PILC and MELC and PELC which was the Mining Industry Liaison Committee, the Petroleum Industry Liaison Committee, the Mining Environment Liaison Committee and the Petroleum Environment Liaison Committee which were groups of people out there that actually advised the department on those particular sort of areas. I found that to be very effective and helpful in getting the co-operation of the industry and of other people.

JL So that element of conferring and working with others would that be a part of how you saw decision making being most effective?

KELLY Yes, to actually try and overcome the problems before you implement the regulations. And of those committees that I mentioned we had other committees which were specifically on safety in the petroleum industry and safety in the mining industry again which did that same sort of thing. All part of sort of an education process so that the actual customers understood what the Mines Department was trying to do to them. And I found that to be the most effective way.

JL Des are there any other subjects relating to those years in the Mines Department you'd like to talk about?

KELLY One of the other issues that evolved was that of Native Title. In the early years in the Mines Department it was a subject that just never came up, that mining tenements were granted over crown land. It may have been the subject of a pastoral lease in which case we had special conditions that we placed on it but rarely was the actual matter of native title ever mentioned. We did have special provisions as to where mining took place over so-called Native Reserves but generally speaking it just wasn't an issue. Through the eighties and then through the nineties one saw that this matter of Native Title became a more and more important issue and to the stage where it had to be considered in respect to every title that was granted. It's taken quite some time I would say a decade, for the various interests to be worked out. But I understand and there's been some publicity recently about agreements that have been reached

in particular areas so it sounds as if that finally that particular difficulty of procedure has been generally overcome.²⁴ But that along with the environment were the two policy areas that emerged which had quite an effect on the way that the mining industry was administered. The other big change that I saw in my time in the Mines Department was really the emergence of computers. I well remember going there in 1980 my secretary had an electric golf ball typewriter²⁵. We had the new-fangled telex machines which were being used for some communication. In the Petroleum Division where they had a special need they had this electric typewriter with just a limited memory, I think 20 words or something with phrases that could be used for special documents. In mapping, and bear in mind that I'm talking about there were about 8,000 new mining tenements applied for and granted each year were all manually drawn on maps. We had a series of 1200 paper maps which you could go into the various mining registrar's office and ask to see a map of the mining tenements, which were changing all the time of course, and they had to be manually updated so that it was true information we were giving to the public.²⁶ In the early eighties we saw the emergence of word processing systems, and I in fact ended up having the biggest interconnected word processing system [in WA], 28 work stations throughout the Mines Department and a central data bank, and that was about by the mid-eighties. And it hardly got to that stage before you started to have the emergence of personal computers. We moved towards getting a mainframe computer and a special room in the new Mines Department building for it.²⁷ It was [the focal point for] all these interconnected stations. We were a bit slow to get into computerisation because I had seen the problems that others were having in managing that change. So we managed it very carefully in small steps. It ended up being a very successful process so that by the time I left in 1992 there was a fully computerised mapping system where all these mining tenements could be pulled up on a screen at different scales anywhere in the State. That the actual registration system which when I went there in 1980 was still based upon a register, a leather bound book, it had all been changed to an electronic register. It was a great deal more efficient

²⁴ Getting to this stage has been a very difficult process, with long periods when virtually no mining title could be granted; hopefully these problems have now been largely overcome. They were certainly major unresolved issues when I left the Mines Department in 1993. DK

²⁵ As an aside, let me comment on typewriters. On my first visit as Under Secretary to the Eastern goldfields I noticed that the typewriters in Kalgoorlie were not very good – they were clearly hand-me-downs from head office. When you went to Coolgardie and Norseman to the Registrar's office, the typewriters were even worse, in this case hand-me-downs from Kalgoorlie. When I got to Leonora and subsequently Marble Bar, the relics they were using were real museum pieces. Clearly the quality of the typewriter was in inverse proportion to the distance from Perth. It took me 10 years to get an interconnected computer system where the quality of the equipment was as good as it was in Perth or Kalgoorlie. DK

²⁶ One sensed that this system was made for computerisation, but how to do it was another question. A parallel service was the tenement registration system where every mining tenement was recorded – date of application, location, date of granting, name of applicant and so on. Over 100 years they had recorded some 350,000 registrations, with some 100 fields of information for each. Until the 1970s this information had been recorded by hand in leather bound registers, but by the time I got there type written information was being pasted into files. Again, one sensed that computerisation had real application to the registration system but how to apply a new system without disrupting the old was the question. DK

²⁷ In planning for the building we insisted that it should be pre-wired with 32 outlets on each floor connected back to the control computer room. There was resistance to this on the grounds of cost and something of a luxury. It was a good decision which facilitated our move into computers. DK

and less consuming of effort. And so really a major change had taken place and with it a change in attitude of people that worked there.

END OF TAPE FOUR SIDE A

JL Des you mentioned that computers brought about a change of attitude in your department. I was wondering you could tell me what that change was?

KELLY Well when I first went there they were all manual systems and what you could do was very much limited by manual resources that you had. Hence the crisis of 35,000 outstanding applications and the inability to do much about it. As one adopted computers we very quickly came to learn that it was no use just computerising the old manual system that you had because there was so much more that you could do in so many different ways that would give a much better end result if you could only postulate what those ways of doing things could be. So that - - - as we introduced computers and people became more used to them they developed this ability to think of doing it different ways. And so after a series of iterations we ended up with a computerised system that could do so much more than the old manual systems of the past.

JL Des, in the course of your career you've done quite a bit of travelling overseas. Would you just give a brief overview of those visits and the sorts of experiences that you had?

KELLY Well the first trip I'd done was in 1968 when I was an officer from Western Australia who went with three other people from elsewhere in Australia to the United Kingdom for a four week period where we looked at Nuclear Power Stations. The question then was whether nuclear power could have been a source for desalination of salt water for use in remote areas of Western Australia in connection with the mining industry. That was a very interesting experience. Of course what I learnt was never applied but still it was a, I guess a good experience for me to see the way that technical solutions could get involved with political activities and political processes also. And of course that particular subject of nuclear power has been on the agenda ever since, and still goes on as something into the future. My next involvement was towards the end of the seventies when at short notice I was asked to accompany the then Premier, Charles Court, to Japan. It was over the Easter weekend and it was to do with iron ore. It was probably the most pressured period of my life in that we seemed to work from day break until bedtime. And it was meeting with the major iron ore companies and steel makers in Japan. It was meeting with banks and it was meeting with other government agencies in Tokyo where obviously Charles Court had long standing and close associations. Those particular times were far from being a holiday because we were required to prepare a briefing for every meeting before one went, to actually attend the meetings and take notes. Then to record those notes before one went to bed that night because if you didn't you'd never catch up. And so with six meetings a day it was really quite a pressured time. Luckily that first trip only lasted about four days. Some of the ones had subsequently with other ministers went on for a week or two or three and became very hard working periods indeed.

JL Yes, well you obviously were so busy that you probably didn't have time to think about too much else except the work that you were involved with but in other times when you were overseas and maybe not so busy were

you - how does it feel to be somebody who is representing their country in situations like this, representative of the government of the country?

KELLY It certainly brought home to me how important it was that there should be these inter-government relationships or the state government taking part and meeting with important people in other countries, as a basis for companies from those other countries investing in Western Australia. It did a lot to obtain their confidence that you had actually government to government backing for their interest and investment in WA. I guess the classic example of that in latter years was really the many visits that the Premier, Premier Richard Court and also Premier Gallop and other ministers had with China in regard to LNG which ends up with this major contract being written between China and Western Australia for the supply of LNG. In those circumstances it was absolutely essential and unavoidable that there had to be strong government to government links to bring about that investment. So indeed it was quite an experience to actually be with your premier or your minister representing the State in these places. One mostly only saw the inside of cars and the inside of board rooms and so on on those trips. But that in itself was quite an experience. The second one that I went on was with Minister Andrew Mensaros when he went to the Arabian Peninsular. That was an interesting experience in '79, to actually visit the Middle East and see the different cultures that were there. Particularly also the ways in which they related to a minister from the State from Western Australia. Andrew Mensaros seemed to be able to create quite a link and an impression to the people that we visited over there. I think a lot of good came out of those particular meetings and increased trade between the Middle East and Western Australia as a result of that. Over the eighties and nineties I did have a series of trips with various ministers and with premiers to Europe and to the United States and particularly to Asia, Korea and Japan and Taiwan and China. All very much a similar pattern of visiting governments and visiting banks and visiting major companies based in those countries. It was on a 1980 visit with Peter Jones at the Houston Oil and Gas Conference that he met with George Bush senior of course in the years before he was President of the United States. And so I was there on that occasion. A few years later when George Bush visited Perth they actually used my office in the Mines Department which was on the corner of Plain Street and the Terrace on the 8th Floor. They used it as an observation place for security because George Bush was staying in the Hyatt which was just over the road. In the nineties I went to the US with Premier Richard Court and we went to Texas to Austin and that's when he met with George Bush junior when he was Governor of Texas. It was in his office in as I say in Austin. So that's been my name dropping (laughs). So I've met both the father and son of the Bush's I don't know whether that's something to be proud of or not but I've done it.

JL So did you enjoy these sorts of occasions, the travelling to different countries?

KELLY Yes, I enjoyed that very much. It was a sort of a sense of occasion about it. On one visit with Richard Court to China we had an audience with the Premier Zhu Rongji which just to be there is - the occasion is something that you don't forget. I enjoyed it very much.

JL The recording session on the 1 April 2004 finished here.

This interview was recorded for the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Institute of Public Affairs Australia, WA Division, on 5 April 2004 with Dr Des Kelly at his home at 21 Pandora Drive, City Beach. The interviewer is Juliet Ludbrook.

JL Des, last time we were speaking you brought your career up to the 1980s but in 1993 with the change of government you were appointed as the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Resources Development. Would you like to say a few words about that appointment and about that work you did there?

KELLY Yes. With the change of government there was an invitation to act as the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Resources Development. It had been called the Department of State Development for some years but with the change of government there was a change of CEO and a change of name of the department. I accepted the invitation with some regret because I was really enjoying the Department of Mines or the Department of Minerals and Energy as it was then called. I'd been there for twelve-and-a-half years and made some significant changes and was feeling that we were really getting somewhere with the changed approach in that department. However, I couldn't resist the challenge of going back to really where I'd begun in the Department of Resources Development which had had its beginnings in that small group that I'd been in in the Public Works Department that had then moved out and gone on to other things so I did make the change. The Department of Resource Development had changed its approach since I'd left it in September 1980. At that time, and in the years previous to that, the main task had been to cope with projects that were going to happen. There'd been a commitment [from companies] for all these things to happen in Western Australia and the main task that the then department had was to co-ordinate those physical activities to bring about the new projects in the most efficient way. But by the time we'd got to the 1990s the department had taken on other roles which was to encourage the development [of the State's resources]. So that when we re-examined what we were doing in DRD when they got there [upon arrival] in 1993 we found that we had in fact a policy role, a planning role, a promotional role and then a co-ordination role. So this encouragement of development was something which was quite important and really something new to when I'd left the department 12 years before. The new approach was encapsulated in the mission of the department which was "to plan, promote and co-ordinate responsible development of the State's resources for the benefit of Western Australians". The department was about 100 people and it remained at that level over the six years that I was there until I retired in early 1999. It was a mixture of people who had come from other government departments like Main Roads, like the Water Corporation and indeed some from the Mines Department who had left those departments seeking a different role, a broader role. We also had a high proportion of people that had come into the department from private industry. Often seeking a job in Perth and often seeking a job which was very much still involved in the mining and resources industry that those individuals had previously worked in. So to that extent the Mines Department was different to other departments in that we had few long standing public servants in that department but lots of people who had come in

from outside. So consequently I always thought it was more dynamic and fast-moving and adaptable to change than many of the traditional government departments. It maintained its role in the six years I was there in doing those things that I mentioned, the planning, promotion and co-ordination of development. It was an exciting time in that there were lots of new projects and we constantly listed what were those various projects and listed them under what were "commissioned projects", in other words what had actually gone into operation in the last period. We had a whole list of "committed projects" that was where private industry had said, we are going to build these things, and our role was one of co-ordinating that. We also had a whole list of projects which were projects "under consideration" where companies out there were trying to do their feasibility studies and to see whether they could in fact develop these various things in Western Australia. And the officers of the department were involved in those companies trying to bring those things about.²⁸

JL Des, well why was the development process so complicated and difficult that they needed such support from the department?

KELLY Well there'd been a great change in the environment in government as reflected in legislation and general approach from the sixties to the nineties in which I found myself working. In the sixties where we were absolutely hungry for any sort of development at all, almost anything went without any impediments being raised by the State whatsoever [except, of course, full compliance with the laws of the land]. But over the years there'd been this development of community awareness on things like the environment, on things like [native] land title, on things like worker safety and all of these other aspects of resource development. And these all had to be taken into account and hurdles overcome before a project could get off the ground. And so what one found is that whilst the company was going through a whole process of concept for the project the feasibility studies and arranging finance and all of those things, the State had to go through a process of considering very carefully all such things as environment and native title, aboriginal heritage, the planning process, the impact on local government, local content and so on. To embody all of that into an agreement which had to go to parliament and receive parliamentary approval before the project could really start and be implemented. This took a great deal of time and it was certainly necessary so that both parties understood before you started what were the rules of the development. But it was time consuming. And I might say that in the last few years since I've left that arena there has been some examination of the process to try and simplify it to make it less complicated than the process that we'd had to adopt in the late nineties in order to meet the State's full requirements. So a great deal of effort was needed to really address all the issues that the State wanted addressed before a project could actually begin.

JL So is that the... when we talk about accountability is that what you would think of in that case or...?

²⁸ The Department also got involved in the various planning processes of the State to make sure that the future needs of the resources industry was not overlooked such as the provision of portsites and railways and so on. DK

KELLY Yes, certainly, [both the Department and the project proponents had to be] accountable to the government as a whole over a whole broad range of issues not just the narrow issues of the physical feasibility of bringing the project into being. It's become a much more complicated process, quite rightly so but that certainly had made it much more difficult for international companies to come into Western Australia to invest. Now the department and of course the minister of the day, and really the governments all wanted the rest of the world to see Western Australia as a place in which you wanted to come in and invest because our whole economy depended on that investment. But on the other hand you had to do that in such a way that the impact on the environment and on the community was quite proper and reasonable and what a modern society would accept.

JL And Des are there any particular aspects of those years with the Department of Resource Development that you particularly would like to speak about?

KELLY Well, one of the programs that I did introduce and one of which I've got fond memories is the Graduate Employment Scheme. Although we were only 100 people in the total department we adopted a policy of taking on two and sometimes four graduates each year and giving them a start in employment within the department. We were able to advertise and obtain the very best graduates, not so much in engineering because there we saw that engineering graduates needed to go elsewhere to get engineering experience. But if in the areas of economics and in science and in environmental science we were able to attract some very good graduates that came to the department. Only some of them stayed with the department and a lot of them actually left and went elsewhere. But at least we'd given them a start and I think they would have fond memories of DRD and perhaps in later years from elsewhere would be able to relate to the department and understand what we did. And I got a great deal of satisfaction out of the quality of the people that we actually got in the department from that scheme.

JL Just as a matter of curiosity what would have taken them elsewhere?

KELLY Well, I remember that one of them married and with her husband went to New York to live. Another one was imbued with doing good works and actually went on an overseas mission to work in an African country doing good things for a year. They were reasons like that. Others went to opportunities elsewhere in the resources industry.

One thing from those years which were quite significant is that I was invited to be part of the steering committee that were selling the Dampier to Bunbury natural gas pipeline. This had been built by the State in the eighties and it was the policy of the government to actually sell it to private enterprise in that late nineties period. I started off as a member of the steering committee but part way through the chairman of that steering committee actually left the position. And so I assumed the leadership of the steering committee for the balance of the sale process. This involved calling for tenders from international companies and finally selecting a successful joint venture to purchase the pipeline at the

price that they'd tendered. The group that were successful is now called Epic Energy. And there's been quite a deal of publicity since that time about the actual management of the pipeline by Epic Energy and by their decision in 2003 and 2004 to actually on-sell it to others. That process is not yet finished.²⁹ So it's something that I'm watching with a great deal of interest having had an involvement in the sale of the pipeline in the past. It was because of that experience I expect that following retirement I was invited to be chairman of the steering committee for the sale of Alinta Gas which was the corporate entity, government owned, which actually provided the gas into the metropolitan Perth and other areas in the State. Again it was a process of calling for tenders for the

sale of a corner stone investment in Alinta Gas followed by a so-called IPO, an Initial Public Offering, where shares in the company were offered to the public. This process ended up with a public listing on the stock exchange in October 2000 thereby ending that sale process. The proceeds were something in just under a billion dollars and was generally regarded as having been successful. It was certainly something which occupied me, occupied a great deal of my time in those immediate post retirement months.

JL During your time, Des, with the Department of Resources Development who was the minister that you were working with?

KELLY Well Colin Barnett was the Minister for those six years that I was with DRD. He was really the last of a long list of ministers that I dealt with over the years. I believe that I developed a satisfactory working relationship with all of those ministers and I think kindly of all of them as they were very important to you as you were trying to manage a department and to do a job of work within government. The first one had been Gerry Wild who I'd had a bit of contact with in the sixties when he was Minister for Works. Charles Court stands out in the late sixties and seventies as a minister who was very much involved in State Development, Resources Development, and was really the driving force behind it. Herbie Graham and Don Taylor were Labor Ministers in those seventies followed by Andrew Mensaros and Peter Jones as Ministers until again a change of government in the early eighties when we had Peter Dowding, David Parker, Geoff Carr and Gordon Hill as the Minister for Mines up until the time I transferred to DRD [in 1993] and Colin Barnett was the Minister. One particularly interesting period was the time when Peter Dowding for one year - - - was Minister for Mines. Because of his background as a lawyer, his personal approach to matters and also his deep interest at the time in Aboriginal affairs he asked some very penetrating questions of the Mines Department and of the things that it was doing. I think it's fair to say that after a period of 12 months the department had changed its attitude on some matters. I think it's fair to say that also Peter Dowding had a better understanding of the mining industry and the approaches that were taken and its philosophies as a result of that exchange that took place.

²⁹ The pipeline was on-sold to a consortium comprising Alcoa, Alinta and DUET (Diversified Utility and Energy Trusts) in October 2004 for \$1.86 billion. DK

JL Does this happen when new ministers do come in. Is there a learning process for them always? How do you cope?

KELLY Well, there is very much a period of exchange of ideas and really a settling down. You find that ministers in opposition or on the backbench develop certain ideas and it's a case of actually discussing those ideas and seeing how they fit in with what has been the historic approach of the department and the philosophies that it has. At the end of that time one does end up with changes in the department but often changes in the minister's approach as they learn more about the department. In the first days of a new ministry there is always a very comprehensive briefing of what the department's about and then a period of questions being asked and answers being given. But as I say the, of all of those times, the most interesting was that period with Peter Dowding as the incoming Minister.

JL So Des would you be able to encapsulate in words what it is that you most admire in people that you've worked under whether they were in early days when you were an engineer or later on when you were working directly with ministers?

KELLY I suppose one does have to separate between the period when one is working as an engineer and involved directly in the construction industry as distinct from the latter years. Certainly in the early years one was impressed by the knowledge and ability of the senior engineers under which I worked that were ultimately the engineer for Harbours and Rivers which was a historic position that had initially been filled by CY O'Connor. Then subsequently by some great names as Engineer for Harbours and Rivers in particular NJ Henry and JD Gillespie who fulfilled that position - - with honour in the Public Works before the Public Works disappeared in the eighties. My very first boss was JD Gillespie who I remember very fondly as a person with great knowledge and a person who was almost a mentor as one gained experience and went up through ranks of the engineering profession. In subsequent years when one got to the stage of dealing with ministers it was a different sort of relationship. One of the things that one really wanted was that the minister should have standing within the government. I guess as Minister for Resources Development there's always been a senior person within government with a fair bit of clout. Starting with Charles Court and with the subsequent ministers. So that was important in being able to influence the affairs of government through your minister. If he was able to actually influence cabinet and therefore government in doing things the way that you hoped they should be done. There were periods during that time where the ministers were of a lower standing in government and those were difficult periods because you found that it was very difficult to achieve what you felt the department should be achieving. But I recognised the difficult situation that those ministers were in and understood those problems that they had.

JL Des, was there anything else that seemed to make a good person to work with, someone you could relate to as a leader?

KELLY Well, I think the most important thing was to have a minister who would actually listen and consider things that you put before them. It was only by that process that you could actually end up with the minister respecting the department and the public service and vice versa. I think it's fair to say that quite a number of the ministers at the beginning had some particular concerns about the public service that we were able to dispel by a performance over a period of time where we were able to convince them that what we were doing was the right thing by government. So an ability to listen and to consider was the most important factor. We did have to go through a change in relationship between the head of department and the minister beginning in the eighties and going on into the nineties where beginning in the eighties to begin with ministers started to have at their side so-called ministerial advisers who had not come up through the public service but tended to come from the political wing of a party. And so often one had the advisers relating to the head of the department rather than the minister himself. This was okay if you happened to have a good ministerial adviser who was mature and knowledgeable person who could handle that situation. Thankfully most of the ministerial advisers that I had to deal with came into this category. But I know some of my colleagues in other departments had a great deal of trouble in that relationship between the head of department, the minister and ministerial advisers. So that was a complication that came into the relationship that is still there and it is a very difficult thing that one must overcome.

END OF TAPE FIVE SIDE A

JL Des, what was the most important thing between establishing agreement between the head of a department, ministerial advisers and the minister?

KELLY The best piece of advice that I ever had was that one should be completely frank with the minister and not have any information that you didn't share with him so that he was totally informed about the affairs of the department. I always maintained that as a basis for establishing a good working relationship with ministers.

JL Des, just to end the section on the DRD what was the most memorable project that you were involved with?

KELLY Mmm. I suppose the first one which was back in the sixties which was the Mt Newman Iron Ore project because it was all so new at the time. Then the one that was still very active when I retired and that was the North West Shelf LNG Project which I had seen develop from just the discovery of the gas in 1972 [or thereabouts] to the location of it on the Burrup Peninsula, for it coming into operation and then indeed as I left in 1999 it was still in the expansion phase which has gone on ever since.³⁰ That was a world size project, the biggest resource development there has ever been in Australia and it has been of great importance to the economy of Western Australia and it's going to continue that way.

JL So how was it when you retired in 1999 having been involved with so many very large and extraordinarily important projects? Was it difficult to step away?

KELLY Yes it was, very difficult, because one's been in the centre of things for all those years. I tried to soften the change by taking on some other roles on a part-time basis and as mentioned this included the sale of Alinta Gas. I also took the position on the Waters and Rivers Commission and on the Board of the WA Land Authority. Those were part-time positions which I enjoyed very much. And really those activities tapered off over the following five years to as it were cushion the effects of the change.

JL Des, you've had a lot of experience both out in the countryside, on the coal face so to speak as well as working in the city and in the public service. I was wondering if you could speak about the differences between those two different lifestyles or maybe there were even more – more than two?

KELLY Mmm. In the early years the work was actually out there in remote regions and hence the time that we lived in the Kimberley for three years is a very memorable time as far as both my wife and I are concerned. When at the time to be based in Broome or Derby or Wyndham the communications were such that you really were almost independent of activities in head office. You only got back to Perth once a year. And I might say that I was there in a period where you were able to take your holidays once a year rather than once every

³⁰ In January 2005 it was announced that LNG Train 5 on The Burrup was to proceed. DK

two years which had been the previous regime.³¹ And so one really had a sense of independence. I think I was lucky in that when coming back to Perth I was still involved in many projects in remote regions and therefore had a reason to go out and visit them as the companies developed these projects. Because what we were interested in were the infrastructure for these remote projects. And so I never really did experience the basis of being in an office in Perth permanently without any, you might say, outside interests. The administration and organisation and co-ordination that I got involved in related to things which were happening out there. And so that brought a deal of interest and excitement to the job which was there until the day I retired. It gave you an opportunity of visiting and relating to people that lived in these places and you did find that they were different to the people in Perth. The mining industry has bred, and breeds a race of people who because of the environment in which they work and because of the dangers that they face day to day end up with a different approach to life than many others who are city based. You could say the same about farmers I guess. I always found that to be of great interest. There's probably a misconception about the public service that lots of people just had this office environment which is very you might say secluded and not in contact with the community. But I'd say particularly the approach which has been taken in the public service in the last decades the emphasis is on relating to the community. Hence you find that people further and further down the scale within an organisation are now being authorised to talk to the press. That never happened in my time. It was always just really the minister's office and almost the head of the department were the only ones that related to the press. Now it's going further and further down the organisation and there's a great deal of emphasis that you must relate to your customers which are the people that you serve. And this applies to all sorts of different disciplines. So I really do think that the concept of the public service being a secluded and sheltered occupation is not correct now if it ever has been.

JL So would you... is this what you would understand as the public service ethic?

KELLY Yes, the ethic has certainly changed. Not entirely for the good. It was a real privilege to get into the public service when I began. It was a most sought after thing. It had a status which was still quite high. For example as a classified public servant you were able to witness documents along with JPs and they usually listed doctors [and other worthy citizens]. But a classified public servant was on that list of people who could perform that, you might say, particular activity. Hence it was of a high status. I think that has declined over the years. The public's attitude of the public service is nowhere near what it was in the past. There was a big change to me in the eighties when Brian Burke was Premier. If you recall overnight he reduced public servants salaries

³¹ Our annual trip to Perth was also by air. Previous to the early 1960s, the once only trip to Perth was by State Ships which took about a week to get to the Kimberleys and this must have added to the remoteness for people doing it that way. Senior engineers from Perth would visit the site every 3 to 6 months and I could talk with Max Anderson by telephone – he was the District Engineer in Derby. All of these things contributed to a sense of independence – of responsibility. It was your job which you had to get done. DK

by 10 percent for a year, and that really I think sent a shudder through the public service in that they felt that they were no longer highly regarded by government itself. I think that was a significant changing point in attitudes within the public service and from outside the public service. One of the good things that's happened within the public service has been the requirement for departments to self examine and come out with statements as to what is their mission in life, what is their role, what are the values that they base their activities upon. What are the things that they're doing? What are they trying to achieve and what are the outcomes and the effects on the community? And I think that's been a very good step forward and it has made public servants much more aware of what they're trying to do so that's one of the good things. But I am just a little sad at the, as I say lowering in the status of the public service amongst the eyes of the community.

JL Des, did you experience any differences in your career between male and female managers or people you worked with, whether it was yourself or whether it was anecdotally?

KELLY Well of course the matter never came up in the early years because there weren't really that many women employed in the public service as I knew it. I think I've mentioned that in the sixties the only women who were around were typists and secretaries and there was very few professional women that we came in contact with. By the time I had got to the Mines Department in the eighties there were a few professional geologists and chemists and you saw the emergence of women in the economics and research groups within departments. You had some women emerging in the corporate services in human resource management and things like that but few of them had really come to the management levels. By the nineties there certainly were some situations where there were groups of men and women with women as the managers but these tended to be mid-level groups. There was always you might say this anecdotal evidence or anecdotal situations that women were supposed to be more personally involved with staff than were their men counterparts in the same situation. I am not sure that I ever actually saw that happen but they were the sort of ideas that were around. What I did notice is that quite a number of people that rose, of women that rose quite quickly through the ranks to take on management levels in mid-management only a very few of them went beyond that.

JL Why do you think?

KELLY Well, what I found was that quite a number of them got to that stage, they saw what was demanded of the next level of management, which was long working hours and a total commitment to the job. You couldn't do it on a part time basis it had to be a full time activity and that brought quite a number of quite capable women managers where they had the conflict between their family responsibilities and actually their work responsibilities. And quite a few of them just decided to forego that opportunity to go further simply on that basis or at least defer it for quite some time. I saw that happen quite a deal. So in many cases it wasn't so much that there was a glass ceiling through which women couldn't move because of ability but it was more that they didn't go any higher

because they didn't want to because they had this conflict between family and the work situation.

JL You don't think that there was ever any sort of prejudice against the fact that they were women? Were you ever conscious of that?

KELLY I don't think so. I thought that there was always a reasonable approach but the fact was that because of history where there hadn't been so many women in the workforce you had a lesser base from which capable managers could come through. I think as time goes by and you're getting to the stage where in many areas, all areas you've got an equal representation of men and women then you've got an opportunity for good women managers to emerge. But in the past they'd been coming from such a narrow base that the number of capable people that come forward be they males or females in the managerial position was less. They weren't represented in the base population. The other thing is that I don't believe that we're still [yet] in the situation where women in the workforce have enough support to enable them to fully participate in the workforce because of child minding facilities and those other things that you need to have that support if you're going to fully participate in the workforce are still not there. That's why I think women have got a very difficult task still in the work place into making advances to the very top.

JL Des, were any of the people you worked with from other countries, and what sort of work were they involved with?

KELLY Well within the department we had quite a number of people who'd come from overseas to work in the department. They of course were all qualified engineers or geologists or environmental scientists that actually had a place within the department. I don't think that was very different to what you found generally in the public service. But of course our department in both mines and DRD related to overseas companies who were developing projects in remote locations in Western Australia. There you couldn't help but notice that most of the people who worked in the remote regions were in fact migrants. There weren't that many Western Australians who actually chose to live out there and so the migrants made an enormous contribution to actually the development of the resource projects in Western Australia that's the basis of our economy.

JL Des you've mentioned a number of interesting incidents, personal incidents in your career. Would you have any other really funny ones that you could relate?

KELLY Well, probably need to go back to the Fremantle Harbour Works days which was in the late fifties. In Fremantle Harbour we'd been dredging the entrance to the harbour but when we'd finished there were still some rocks protruding from the base of the harbour in isolated places. And the way in which they were to be removed was to actually lower explosives down on to these bits of rock and blast them away. That seemed to be the best way of doing it. So we carefully surveyed in where these spots were so that the boat loaded with explosives could lower them down on to the right spot and that's

what they did. A rowing boat with a man in the stern who lowered the explosives over the back with a weight. Then when they'd got on to the bottom he signalled to his rowers in the same boat to take the boat away to a safe distance before they would then explode and blast the piece off. We were watching from the shore as they did this and it all went well until he told them to row away. Unbeknown to him there was quite a strong tide running so that as they rowed away they in fact stayed right above the explosive and the wire that they were feeding out as they rowed away was just looping out with the tide. So as we watched and could do nothing about it they finally, thinking they were a safe distance away, exploded this charge which in fact was right underneath their boat. This great plume of water and dirt came up and surrounded the boat much to their consternation.(laughing) I can still remember seeing these fellows standing in the stern of the boat and looking a hundred yards away where they thought the explosion was going to be instead it was immediately underneath them. Nobody was hurt so we could laugh about it but I always recall that with some amusement.³²

JL Des in your working life and you've obviously worked with many people, have these work colleagues become friends? Do you socialise with the people that you work with?

KELLY I think the further one goes up the organisation the more difficult it becomes to socialise with your work colleagues except for the actual events that one purposely organises to bring about some sort of communication within the department. However the people that I relate to today a number of them come from the various working situations that I've been involved in over the years. I play golf on a Saturday morning with one colleague who was with me in the sixties. Another one that was my successor in the Mines Department as head of the department and in other areas where I work I still relate to people from the various work situations that I've been in. Certainly as head of the department one becomes somewhat isolated socially from the rest of the organisation. There was some networks within the public service between the heads of the various departments. We were brought together under a liaison committee that advised government on general matters relating to the public service and I was chairman of that for quite some years. And ones colleagues there were as I say heads of other government departments. And so some support, mutual support came from that sort of level. But generally speaking as a head of department it's - there's not many directions you can look for support. You're on your own resources to a high degree. In regard to social events one memory which I treasure was the breakfasts that the Department of Resources

³² Another, not quite so funny incident happened in Geraldton in 1956 when I was working there. A repaired marker buoy had to be replaced in the outer seaward approaches to the Port of Geraldton - and of course, being a navigation aid, it just had to be in the right place. The way to do this was to measure on the chart the two angles subtended at the right spot by three prominent on shore marks, in this case the Point Moore lighthouse, the radio mast in town and the Bluff Point lighthouse. Then it was a case of going offshore on a barge loaded with the buoy and anchor, move about until the angles were right and then drop the buoy over the side. Unfortunately, offshore Geraldton there is always a huge swell and it was no different on the day that we had to drop the buoy. I will not forget the several hours on the heaving barge, sextant in each hand to measure the angles, feeling very seasick, but having to keep going until the barge was in the right spot. It was a long day. DK

Development used to have before Christmas each year. As head of the department I and the other directors would cook breakfast on the barbecues on the South Perth foreshore for the rest of the staff. So we gathered there at 7.30 and had our breakfast and then went off to work. On one occasion we had a group of Chinese students who'd been brought by exchange down and they were working with the department for a period and so we invited them to breakfast. And something which they just found very difficult to even conceive was that the boss and the directors were cooking breakfast for the troops. I feel quite sure that they've taken that particular story back and it's been related a thousand times in China simply from the reaction that we got to them as the head of Department of Resources Development cooked them an egg for breakfast.

JL Who introduced that idea?

KELLY Oh I introduced that one. Although perhaps one of my colleagues suggested it and I picked it up. But certainly we introduced that and it was still going at the time when I retired from DRD.

JL Des, has anybody started out in the public service at the same time as you did and continued through to as long as you have?

KELLY Probably in answering this question one needs to look at my colleagues who made up the four cadets who joined the public service in 1951. One of those retired from the public service early on and went into private enterprise. I might say that that was after he had been posted to the country areas of Western Australia and this was in the early sixties to live in a hessian tent, cement washed, with his wife and two children. I think at that stage he thought there might be a better life somewhere else so he went into private enterprise. Another one left the public service after about 10 years, again to go into private enterprise as an engineer and he ended up with a senior position in a private company. A third one who stayed within the public service ended up reaching middle management in the Water Corporation and probably was constrained to that because he had not moved out of a particular area into other areas of the public service where there were greater opportunities.

JL Des has anybody, other members of your family worked in the public service.

KELLY I have an uncle since passed away but he in fact worked in the public service for longer than I did, something over 50 years. He'd been quite good at school and he'd obtained his Junior Certificate when he was 13 and so had entered the public service essentially before his 14th birthday. He worked there until he retired at age 65 so it was some 51 years.

END OF TAPE FIVE SIDE B

This interview was recorded for the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Institute of Public Affairs Australia, WA Division, on 5 April 2004 with Dr Des Kelly at his home at 21 Pandora Drive, City Beach. The interviewer is Juliet Ludbrook.

JL Des you were telling me about your uncle who was in the public service.

KELLY Yes, he had a long career, 51 years. He worked a great deal of that time in the Local Government Department. He also was the accountant at the State Engineering Works for a number of years. Needless to say he was known as Ned Kelly during most of his career in the public service.

JL When you joined was he somewhat of a mentor at the time or was...?

KELLY Yes he was. He was actually - he was a guarantor to me for the documentation that we had to sign to become a cadet engineer in the public service and so he supported me in that regard. Incidentally his name was Ernest Holcombe Kelly. The Holcombe bit is named after an estate in Devon where our forebear who'd got out in the potato famine from Ireland and been taken on a fishing boat round to England, the estate that he landed on was called Holcombe. That's where he worked for a number of years before he left there and ended up in Australia. So it's a family name that's been carried through a number of people that have had Holcombe in their names.

JL Des, thinking of the many years that you were in a management position how would you sum up your particular management style?

KELLY Mmm. I think it's a style that you develop over years having tried different approaches and seen that the affect that they were [having] and so one changes and develops as one goes along. One principle that I've always had was that you could not allow anybody under you to fail in what they were doing. So that by all means you delegated to them responsibility for doing things in their own way but you had to intervene if you felt that they really weren't going to be able to succeed because as I saw it the worst thing that could happen to somebody is that they should fail. What it did to them was not really worthwhile, not something that you liked to see. So that was one principle that I always had. I compared management to really my other love which was the game of hockey where you had some managers who performed like the centre forward that wanted to score all the goals and showed his followers that was the way to do it and encouraged them to do like that. There are other people who played like the centre half back where they spent some of their time defending the department in its situation but the rest of the time passing the ball to others so that they could perform. You could have the full back who spent most of his time defending the department and had the occasional long pass to the forward so that others could succeed. Or you could have the coach that sat on the sidelines that just coached and tried to direct and help people to do their jobs. I tended to want to be a playing coach so that you did try to coach other people to succeed but you were in there helping them where it was

necessary. So I think that's the style that I tried to develop. I once went to a management seminar where they ask you these questions so that they could categorise you as to what sort of manager you were and I filled this in and the result was that I was called a 'benign dictator'. (laughs) I rather fancied that. I suppose I tried to carry that concept through being head of a number of departments.

JL So in your role as a dictator, benign or whatever, if you wanted advice though where would you go? I mean would it be just to colleagues or would it even involve family. I mean where would you get your support or your advice?

KELLY I think the advice that one got tended to be of a technical organisational nature rather than a personal advice. In coming up through the organisation there were people who would give you personal advice and I've mentioned the senior engineers that I worked under. But once you get above a certain level you're really almost on your own as to the approach that you take to various situations. And on the technical situation and with regard to management and organisation there were always the private industry groups like the Chamber of Mines and Energy who had an opinion on what the department was doing. There was the minister who could tell you what he thought and there was always the under treasurer who would view the department and tell you what you should be trying to achieve so that - and there were always the colleagues within the department who had views as to what the organisation should be doing. So really the direction you took was a consensus, an amalgamation of all these different ideas when which having heard them you then had to decide which way you were going.

JL And Des was the number of responsible positions that you had in your career, did the time and the stress of those appointments ever cause any undue stress at home or, well, even within the work environment? How did you cope with that energy level which was obviously necessary?

KELLY I, right from an early stage came to recognise that I was overdoing it when I couldn't sleep properly. So as soon as I got the sign that I couldn't get a good night's sleep I knew that I had to back off. That proved to be a very valuable indicator which enabled me to moderate what I was doing to keep it at a reasonable level.

JL So this is something that would happen when maybe you were involved in a project that would be the indicator this could happen over a number of years?

KELLY Yes. It usually wasn't any, a project but was a whole lot of situations that all needed to be addressed simultaneously which one tried to juggle priorities. But as I say I always found that the first thing that I knew I was over doing it was when I couldn't sleep properly. And as soon as that happened I set about modifying what I was doing to stop that happening. I was always also fortunate in that my wife did not work and so was able to take the major responsibility in looking after the children and the home. And those situations I

guess much much more than you see happens today. That was a great help to me in being able to divert as much energy and time to the job – I was able to do that. And I guess together we were able to balance up this home life with sort of work life.

JL When you said that when you realised it was getting too much you modify what you were doing. In what ways would you... what consistent... what did that modification consist of?

KELLY Well that modification consisted of a very conscious effort to prioritise the things that you had to do and to focus on the really important ones and to set aside for the time being or give to somebody else the responsibility for those things that were further down the priority list. There was always a tendency to try and do too much in too many areas and it was only by conscious prioritisation that you could actually cut the activity down to a manageable level.

JL Do you think if you were joining the public service now in 2004, would you, well would you even want to join the public service?

KELLY It's a totally different world to when I joined it. I don't think I would have joined the public service or would join the public service today because as a professional engineer I think most of the opportunities are out there in the private sector whereas in my time as an engineer the exciting work was within government so that's been a change over 50 years. So for that reason I doubt if I would go into the public service. However, there is still a most important job, most important role for all the public service that and it's certainly a very worthwhile occupation and I just hope that the way that it's managed still preserves a quality public service. Because I think it's so essential to our way of life, our form of government, our whole social situation. Just go to another country where government is not so good, public service is not so good and is corrupt, and you find that affects the whole society. So I very much believe that good government, good public service is most important and I hope we preserve it.

JL Which leads very nicely into the question if you had to choose three words to describe a successful or good public servant what would you choose, what would be the three words you would choose?

KELLY Successful and good public servant. Words like honesty, integrity, dedication. There's your three words.

JL Des, to succeed in any job a person must have some kind of passion for whatever they're about. Can you tell us what motivated you throughout your working life?

KELLY I think I've always had a passion to do well anything that I took on and to leave no stone unturned, and to succeed in whatever I was trying to do. I think that was the you might say the personal passion. I think that in the work situation fairly early on I came to see the importance of the mining industry to

the future of the State, mining industry going into resource development. And so I was very happy that my course of employment led me into that particular sphere. I felt it was always worthwhile. Yes.

JL Is there any other aspect of your personal experience that you'd like to address at all? But maybe just before that there's one question we haven't addressed was, what influence have ideologies had on the public service as you see it such as productivity deals etc.?

KELLY Mmm. I picked up concept of workplace agreements and some flexibility in working arrangements with enthusiasm when we had the opportunity to do so. We made some minor changes within the Department of Resources Development which were very worthwhile. An example is that we all agreed that a very quiet time in the department was between Christmas and New Year because most of the companies that we dealt with out there didn't do much during that period. So we all in a workplace agreement agreed that we would take some of our annual leave in that period so that the total department would close down for a time. The people would not take their annual leave when they chose to but in fact would put a few days there. Now that was a small thing that I am sure increased the productivity of the total department because there was never much going on between Christmas and New Year, much that you could do. So it was one little change that we made. And there were others that we brought in in the way that people were organised that were reflected in the workplace agreement that I thought was good, it helped us. I've noticed that there has now been a return to rigidity of an award which prescribes a number of these things. I think that's a backward step because I thought the flexibility of workplace agreements was a worthwhile innovation.

JL Des, work has dominated you for many years but you obviously achieved some sort of balance to become so successful. So how did you achieve that balance?

KELLY Well I've mentioned that my wife Pam has helped me to balance those work responsibilities with family responsibilities. But I also had a couple of philosophies which I have maintained and one of them was that one should take your holidays as they came along and use them. Even though that might have some sort of affect on your career but it was worthwhile taking the risk so that you enjoyed long service leave and holidays as you went along. And so for that reason we always in the seventies for a 10 or 15 year period had regular caravan trips throughout remote Western Australia with the kids and another family in their caravan so we had some great holidays going in that direction which the kids still remember. We had one overseas trip with the kids when we went by motorised caravan around Europe and England. We've always had access to a beach shack at Shoal Water Bay which we've used on a regular basis which gives one a quiet seaside holiday when you really needed it. It was also a place again that the children enjoyed and they are now taking their families and doing the same sort of thing. So holidays have always been very important to us. The other side of it is that I've always tried to maintain sporting interests. Firstly because it gave you a reason to keep fit. I'm not a person that enjoys running just for running sake. I don't enjoy gymnasiums and exercise for

that purpose. I'd like to use any energy I've got in actually playing games. So we've been life time members of the local tennis club which has meant that we played there on a social basis both Pam and I. And it gives interaction with a whole cross-section of other people that have got nothing to do with the public service and therefore it's an outlet and it gives you a perspective on things that you can't get from just within the public service. The other thing that we've played or that I've played is hockey and Pam's been involved on the social side of that. And particularly for the last 20 years we've been involved in the State Representation Veteran's Teams that have gone and played carnivals in a dozen places throughout Australia one on each year and we always take a part in that. Again that's been a great outlet and an interaction with another group of people. So it's really by those two ways that I've tried to keep a balance between work and the home situation. I felt that it has been very beneficial to me in keeping that contact with such a wide cross section of people.

In looking back on a career of more than 50 years in the public service I think I've been fortunate to get involved in an area of activity which has been important to the development of Western Australia. I started off in Public Works on actually building infrastructure then found myself within the government relating to private companies, mining companies who were building infrastructure of importance to the State. That led on to wider involvement with the mining industry and hence the background which enabled me to be appointed as Undersecretary for Mines in 1980. From that point onwards it's been very much a direct association with the mining industry and the projects that flow out of that. And so I think that it's been a good fortune to get into such an area that's been of such a great deal of interest and where things were happening all the time. I've also been fortunate in that following retirement there's been some other activities which I have been able to taper off over a few years and they've also been of great interest to me.

JL Thank you Des for your time and your memories.

That was the end of the series of interviews conducted on the 25 March, 1 April and 5 April , 2004 with Dr Des Kelly.

END OF INTERVIEW